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**RB KITAJ AND THE IDEA OF EUROPE**

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**Doctor of Philosophy**

**University of Sussex**

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**Volume I**

**TEXT**

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The Library, Pallant House Art Gallery, Chichester

The Special Collections Library, Leeds University

The Special Collections Library, The University of California, Los Angeles

The Archive of the National Gallery, London

The Archive of the Philadelphia Museum of Art

The Hyman Kreitman Archive and Study Room, Tate Gallery, London

The Prints & Drawings Study Room, Tate Gallery, London

Blythe House, Victoria & Albert Museum, London

The National Art Library, Victoria & Albert Museum, London

The Prints and Drawings Study Room, Victoria & Albert Museum, London

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## SUMMARY

### **RB Kitaj and the Idea Of Europe**

This thesis analyses European themes in the work of the American painter RB Kitaj. It focuses most closely on the 1960s, a relatively under-researched period of his work, certainly compared with the 1970s and 80s, in part because most of the existing literature follows Kitaj's reading of his own oeuvre. Using canvases from the 1960s as examples, the thesis examines Kitaj's concerns with the history of the European Left prior to World War II. Study of these paintings reveals how, even at this early stage of his career, Kitaj conflated autobiography and history. A comparison of Kitaj's published and draft texts, written during and after these paintings were made, shows him altering their meaning according to his current concerns. This, in turn, shows how his revisions influenced later scholars' readings. Furthermore, due attention is given to two important, though often overlooked, bodies of work from the 1960s: the screenprints and the installation made at Lockheed for the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. Both reveal a sustained engagement with European themes, such as the Industrial Revolution, Modernism and its legacies, and Jewish history. Whereas Kitaj emphasised the centrality of Judaism to his work throughout the 1970 and 80s, he downplayed his concern with technology and Modernism, although both continued to inform his imagery until well into the 1980s. His shift away from new technology (eg photo-screenprinting) and a Modernist aesthetic, in favour of life drawing, is analysed against contemporary artistic debates in Britain, together with his fascination with the evolving history of the European Left during the 1970s. Kitaj's work reveals a sustained but constantly modulating, at times conflicted, meditation on European history and culture from an American perspective. In the final analysis, however, his engagement with Europe is, perhaps, the result of a spiritual and psychological impulse rooted in his personal and family history.



**RB KITAJ AND THE IDEA OF EUROPE**

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## INTRODUCTION

Ronald Brooks Kitaj (1932-2007) was an American painter who spent much of his working life in Europe. Although for a time he attended Cooper Union, New York, most of his artistic training took place in Europe, at art schools in Vienna, Oxford and London. At various times he maintained homes in Oxford, Dulwich and Chelsea, as well as the Catalan coastal town of Sant Feliu de Guixols and, more briefly, in Paris. Although he regularly returned to the USA, Europe clearly played an important role in his life.

Europe is, however, of greater significance than mere geography or topography. Subjects from European literature, history, philosophy and politics abound in Kitaj's work. Through their titles, and the notes and texts he appended to them, his paintings, pastels, prints and drawings make direct reference to the social and political upheavals of Europe between, roughly, 1900 and 1950, with frequent allusions to the broader history and culture of Europe often being made.

Kitaj's family provides some personal context for this engagement with European themes. His maternal family were Eastern European Jews who fled Russian Pogroms; his father's family came from Hungary; and his stepfather's family were Austrian Jews who had escaped Vienna just before the Second World War. In addition to this personal impetus, the long-standing American cultural dialogue with Europe needs to be taken into account. Numerous American painters from Benjamin West in the 18<sup>th</sup> to Cy Twombly in the 20<sup>th</sup> century have crossed the Atlantic to experience European culture at first hand.

It was arguably in this country that Kitaj made his greatest impact and histories of British art rarely fail to mention him. During the 1960s, he was a leading figure

associated with British Pop Art, providing both advice and an example to his younger fellow students at the Royal College of Art, such as David Hockney.<sup>1</sup> In the 1970s, he became something of a polemicist, arguing for a return to figurative art in a time of abstraction and conceptualism.

### Thesis Outline

This account takes the form of five extended chapters, divided into a series of sub-chapters, each examining particular aspects of Kitaj's work as they relate to the topic of Europe. Themes run across and between these discussions, reflecting on and amplifying the points raised in each. They are arranged in broadly chronological order, ranging from the 1950s until the mid-1970s, with a particular focus on the 1960s. My interest in this period reflects a desire to excavate areas of the artist's output that, when I began my research, had rarely been discussed and, in some respects, remains so. As his ideas developed through the 1970s, Kitaj began to adopt a dismissive attitude to earlier work, especially if it contradicted the view he then wished to project. *The Human Clay*, the 1976 exhibition he curated on British contemporary figuration, his focus on drawing the figure, and his increased interest in Judaism and Jewish themes, which preoccupied him from the 1970s onwards, tend to dominate much of the current literature. These publications were largely written with Kitaj's involvement and post-date 1980. Since 2012, however, a major retrospective staged at the Jewish Museum, Berlin, and a catalogue raisonné of his prints published by the British Museum, have begun the process of broadening out the scope of Kitaj studies.

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<sup>1</sup> David Hockney cited in Nikos Stangos (ed.), *David Hockney by David Hockney* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1976), 41.

Chapter 1 sets the scene for Kitaj. It begins with a brief account of American artists' engagement with Europe since the 18<sup>th</sup> century, which will show that there has been a longstanding dialogue between the United States and Europe. This can be characterised as an escape from a perceived restrictive provincialism towards an immersion in a rich cultural heritage that the USA is, paradoxically, part of and apart from. The chapter then develops into a discussion of the situation around 1950, when many young Americans, including Kitaj, travelled to Europe to study and gain first-hand experience of European culture. Consideration is also given, in this section, to Kitaj's position within British Pop. It asks the question: to what extent does Kitaj's output resemble the work of his British contemporaries? Within this discussion I will examine the idea of nostalgia within British Pop, as proposed by Erica Battle in 2015, and its implications for Kitaj's own fascination with the history 20<sup>th</sup>-century Europe.<sup>2</sup> It then hones in to examine his early experiences of Europe, in Vienna and Spain, before discussing a group of his early paintings on the theme of the Spanish Civil War.

Building on these ideas, Chapter 2 takes the form of an in-depth analysis of the painting *The Murder of Rosa Luxemburg*. A sustained discussion of Kitaj's use of *The Journals of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* will analyse how he mined them for imagery and consider the implications of these images for the meaning of his canvas. It will be shown that ideas around German culture, history and politics are deeply embedded in the imagery of this particular painting. The discussion will then address Aby Warburg's ideas and their significance for Kitaj's work in general, and *The Murder of Rosa Luxemburg* in particular. This painting foregrounds violence erupting

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<sup>2</sup> Erica Battle, 'A Nostalgia for Now: British Pop and the New Immediacy of Cultural Memory' in Darsie Alexander and Bartholemew Ryan (eds), *International Pop* (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 2015) 117-118.

within civilised culture and this, it will be argued, has analogies with Warburg's sense of the irrational lying beneath the veneer of rational civilisation. Consideration will be given to the relationship of this canvas to the *Lustmord* genre which evolved in Weimar Germany. Woven into this discussion is a consideration of the artist's use of written texts. This particular canvas has text applied to its surface. Twenty years after completing it, Kitaj wrote a further text about the painting. I will argue that he was attempting to create a hybrid art, in which content was as important as form, at a time when debates around progressive art tended to favour formalism.

Shortly after painting *The Murder of Rosa Luxemburg*, Kitaj began making screenprints at Kelpra Studios in London, in close collaboration with the printer, Chris Prater. I will discuss these works in chapter 3. The nature of his working relationship with Prater challenges the image of himself that Kitaj later tended to project. Rather than being the traditional figure of the artist working alone, with brush and charcoal, the Kitaj of the Kelpra period engaged enthusiastically with a then new medium – screenprinting – and, significantly, allowed Prater considerable autonomy when assembling the images. In fact, he had to as he was in California for sustained periods throughout the 1960s and many of these outstanding prints were composed by correspondence. The contrast these works, and the technically advanced means by which they were produced, make with the monumental figure drawings Kitaj began to make in the 1970s, together with a reassessment of his practice, led to him later downplay the significance of the Kelpra prints.

It is, perhaps, in the screenprints that Kitaj's interest in early Modernism, particularly Russian Suprematism and Mondrian, is most apparent. Geometry, specifically the grid, appears constantly in these works. Within these abstract motifs are layered

images drawn from the artist's own work, art history, photo-journalism, technical manuals and popular culture. Close reading of this plethora of imagery reveals themes which centre on early- to mid-20<sup>th</sup> century European culture and history but which frequently weave in elements of cryptic autobiography. Jewish themes, for instance, can be detected, although the artist would not overtly express his concern with this subject until the late-1970s.

The themes of industry and technology will be enlarged upon in Chapter 4. This section will concern itself initially with the least known aspect of Kitaj's work, the installation *Mock Up: Lives of the Engineers*, produced around 1969 at Lockheed's Burbank Factory, for Los Angeles County Museum of Art's *Art & Technology Project*. I will argue that this now fragmentary work is closely related to his interest in Modernism and Modernity and its own afterlife can be detected in his subsequent work. As with his contemporary paintings and screenprints, much of the source material for *Lives of the Engineers* is drawn from a scholarly source, in this case *Art and the Industrial Revolution* by Marxist art historian Francis Donald Klingender. In this installation, his sole foray into sculpture, Kitaj quotes or paraphrases in three-dimensions, imagery from Klingender and other authors, to create an environment on the theme of the Industrial Revolution and its legacies, appropriate enough, after all, for a project called *Art & Technology*. At its heart, Kitaj himself suggests, is a concern with the implications the beginnings of industry will have for people, which he identifies as 'poverty, despair, loneliness.'<sup>3</sup> I will then pursue Kitaj's interest in Klingender and visualisations of industry into his later work. In subsequent paintings, including major canvases like *If Not, Not*, Kitaj drew upon visualisations of industry,

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<sup>3</sup> Kitaj, quoted in Maurice Tuchman, *Report of the Art & Technology Programme* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1971), 162.

as well as the iconography of his own Lockheed project, but repurposed them to more metaphorical ends.

Finally, I will consider Kitaj's re-engagement with tradition, as manifested in a return to drawing the figure and, specifically in terms of his polemical exhibition, *The Human Clay*, devised for the Hayward Art Gallery in 1976. If his earlier work can be seen as a response to European Modernism, his work of the 1970s and beyond can be seen as an attempt reassert a tradition threatened by 'the various versions of Modernism [that] continue to burden everything'.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, he associates this, in the *Human Clay* catalogue text and other contemporary writings, with the collapse of Right-wing regimes and re-emergence of Socialist politics across southern Europe at that time, so re-engaging with themes which had first found expression in his work of the early 1960s. This mood of change, of democratization, chimed with Kitaj's own desire for a shift within the art world, away from tired Modernist orthodoxies to a more democratic, public focused art.

### Kitaj's Texts

Kitaj wrote a great deal about his own work and I have used these various texts as lenses through which to view his art. There are five types of text and it is useful to explain them here.

First: in the case of a small number of paintings from the early 1960s, Kitaj wrote short notes that he literally glued to the canvas. As a rule the text is an excerpt from his reading, appropriate to the ostensible subject of the painting, sometimes

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<sup>4</sup> Kitaj RB, letter to Edward Chaney, postmarked 8.1.1974, quoted in Eckhart Gillen, *Obsessions* (Berlin: Jewish Museum Berlin, 2012), 103.



accompanied by a short bibliography, as in the case of *The Murder of Rosa Luxemburg*.

Second: to accompany his first London solo show, *Pictures with Commentary*, *Pictures without Commentary*, at the Marlborough Gallery in 1963, and his first New York solo show at Marlborough Gerson Gallery in 1965, Kitaj devised short but sophisticated publications, complete with his own catalogue notes and photographic details from his own work, as well as full-plate illustrations and visual material from other sources. Sometimes the catalogue texts are analogous to those glued to the paintings, sometimes they are more or less brief observations by the artist, sometimes extensive quotes from other authors.

Third: from the late-1970s, Kitaj began to write and have published short texts to some of his paintings and prints, which he called *prefaces*. These differ from the first two cases in a significant way: they are retrospective, some having been composed over twenty years after the work they accompany. Furthermore, these texts, unlike the earlier ones, mix modes. Within one preface we may find autobiography, fiction, quotation, history in all its forms – art, literary, philosophical, social and political – and passages in which he appears to explain the meaning of the work or his intentions when creating it.

All of these texts form not straightforward commentary but extra content to the paintings. They need to be seen, I believe, as a part of the work. Rather like Richard Hamilton, who also wrote extensive commentaries to his own output, Kitaj was creating hybrid works which consciously challenged the then prevailing Modernist idea that the work of art was autonomous. I will analyse examples of these texts in chapter 3.

Fourth: throughout the course of his career Kitaj wrote a small number of longer texts in which he makes a propositional case for his work and working methods. These range from short, pithy essays such as *On Associating Texts with Paintings* from 1964 to the more discursive *Second Diasporist Manifesto* of 2007. The title of the former is particularly important as it sheds light on his motivation for using text in relation to his painting. Of especial significance, I think, is his use of the word ‘associating.’ It recalls André Breton’s remarks in the *Surrealist Manifesto* of 1924:

Surrealism is based on the belief in the superior reality of certain forms of previously neglected associations, in the omnipotence of dream, in the disinterested play of thought.<sup>5</sup>

Fifth: in addition to the foregoing, there are numerous unpublished texts such as letters, notebook jottings and drafts, and the extensive typed manuscript *Confessions*, which reside in research libraries, in particular the Special Collections of the Charles E Young Research Library, University of California Los Angeles.<sup>6</sup> Of particular interest is the series of letters Kitaj wrote to Chris Prater of Kelpra Studio. This correspondence held at Pallant House, Chichester, gives valuable insight, not only into the working methods and relationship between the two men, but of Kitaj’s high degree of engagement with the work at hand. He is not writing here with a view to publication but as an active agent in the creative process. The disparity between the sheer excitement and sense of fun that characterises his attitude whilst engaged in making these remarkable prints and his subsequent dismissal of them is striking.

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<sup>5</sup> Breton, André (trans Richard Seaver and Helen R Lane), *Manifestoes of Surrealism* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press 1969, paperback 1972), 26.

<sup>6</sup> I am grateful to Marco Livingstone for bringing this material to my attention.

### A Historiography

The question of Kitaj's expatriation emerges early in the available literature. In the catalogue to his 1965 exhibition at Los Angeles County Museum of Art he answered a series of questions posed by curator, Maurice Tuchman. When asked if his work would have been different had he lived in America, he is unequivocal:

I strongly suspect that my painting would *not* be as it is had I returned to America some years ago. Roughly speaking, the fresh engaging currents in post-War art have been running here in N.Y. for some long while now and the strengths in American art very often seem to rub off at close quarters (De Kooning through Rauschenberg through Johns, et al) ... No doubt one could not have avoided peculiarly *American* experience and equations therefrom.

Perhaps the more interesting question, that of the Britishness of his work, whilst not put is, perhaps, indirectly answered. If, as he says, he could not: 'have avoided peculiarly *American* experience and equations therefrom,' then it seems reasonable to propose that neither could he have avoided peculiarly *British* experience and equations therefrom.

Werner Haftmann, writing in the catalogue to the 1969 exhibition *RB Kitaj: Complete Graphics*, also acknowledges Kitaj's unusual status by making him fit in, stating:

'One could, without hesitation, consider this American from Cleveland, a member of the current English school, along with Paolozzi, Hockney and Allen Jones.'<sup>7</sup>

However, Haftmann was not satisfied with this simple analysis. Further on, he sees a strain of Romanticism in Kitaj, quoting a passage from Novalis to illustrate his point.

He then proceeds to make a subtly perceptive remark:

This unexpected connection with the source of Romanticism shows Kitaj's constant effort to obtain a 'historical depth' which breaks out of the ephemeral

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<sup>7</sup> Werner Haftmann, *RB Kitaj: Complete Graphics 1963-1969* (Berlin: Galerie Mikro, 1969), unpaginated.

contemporary context to sink spiritual roots into the past from which his own conception can grow.<sup>8</sup>

This effort to obtain historical depth and to sink spiritual roots into the past is facilitated, Haftmann argues, through Kitaj's attention to content. In this connection, Aby Warburg is invoked:

Warburg [...] showed that by decoding long-hidden relationships of content and iconography, a work of art reveals its spiritual riches and documentary significance in the history of culture – the legend of mankind.

I will attempt to build on the implications of these remarks throughout the following thesis.

The first substantial exhibition catalogue on the artist was an American publication. *Kitaj: Paintings, Drawings and Pastels*, edited by Joe Shannon, was the catalogue to the 1981 retrospective at the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution. The show toured to Cleveland Museum of Art before travelling to the Städtische Kunsthalle, Düsseldorf. It features contributions from Shannon himself, poet John Ashbery (a friend of the artist), Jane Livingstone and an interview between Kitaj and painter Timothy Hyman.

Although the book leans heavily in favour of more recent work, in particular the pastels characteristic of the late-1970s, its overall take on Kitaj is remarkably even-handed. The contributions of Ashbery and Shannon range across his oeuvre making telling points along the way, for instance drawing analogies with the procedures of artists as different as Roberto Matta and Cy Twombly. Interestingly enough, no reference is made to the fact that these three artists had all crossed the Atlantic to work in Europe: Kitaj and Twombly being from the United States, Matta from Chile.

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<sup>8</sup> Haftmann, *RB Kitaj: Complete Graphics 1963-1969*, unpaginated.

Shannon, for instance, identifies Kitaj as an ‘impure modernist, alternately embracing and discarding canons.’ At the same, he points out the contrariness:

[The artist] is an equally impure traditionalist, even now, during his most naturalistic period, his abstractionist side consistently contradicts his powerful depictive impulses...<sup>9</sup>

At that point in time, the *Human Clay* was only five years distant, and the exhibition was surveying essentially twenty years’ worth of work, so a good number of paintings from the 1960s and early 1970s are picked out for discussion. But, like much contemporary art writing, the tendency is towards colourful description and atmospheric analogies. *The Ohio Gang* of 1964, for instance, ‘augurs petty thievery, venereal disease and murder.’<sup>10</sup> It is compared not unreasonably with Picasso’s etching *Minotauremachie*, but without reaching any firm conclusions. Instead we are told:

The Ohio Gang is one of those images, like *Minotauremachie*, that is so replete with possibilities that historians will be trying to unravel its enigmas for years. This we do know, that it is about our times, about viciousness and exploitation, about licence and perverted porcine appetites.<sup>11</sup>

Often it is the poet, Ashbery, who makes the most interesting observations. He draws attention to Kitaj’s admiration for abstract artists such as Mondrian and Brancusi.

Similarly, his own use of abstraction is alluded to:

... he introduces ‘non-objective’ rectangles at the centre of *Sorrows of Belgium*, 1965, [...] letting the war happen in the margins; or enunciates an entirely abstract Mondrianesque composition in *Chelsea Reach (First Version)*,

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<sup>9</sup> Joe Shannon, ‘The Allegorist: Kitaj and the Viewer,’ in Joe Shannon (ed.), *Kitaj: Paintings, Drawings and Pastels* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1983), 18-19.

<sup>10</sup> Shannon, *Kitaj: Paintings, Drawings and Pastels*, 25.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

1969, which is neither homage nor parody but merely Kitaj speaking in another voice...<sup>12</sup>

Marco Livingstone's *RB Kitaj* (republished in 2013 as *Kitaj*), is still, perhaps, the most substantial monograph on the artist. It takes the form of a biography into which the work is studied at the appropriate chronological point. The book was written in close consultation with the artist and there are benefits to this in the form of, for instance, early versions of the prefaces. On the other hand, it means there is a distinct bias towards Kitaj's preferred view of himself. *RB Kitaj* was published in 1980, four years after the *Human Clay* exhibition. Accordingly, emphasis is laid on the artist's adherence to the figure and life drawing. Certain bodies of work, such as the screenprints, on the other hand, are hastily dismissed. Overall, the approach is descriptive rather than analytical. Kitaj's studies in Oxford and London are seen within the context of eminent figures such as Henry James and Gertrude Stein, but little is said of other, contemporary Americans who may have been in Europe around the same time.<sup>13</sup> His experiences at the RCA left him 'hardly changed' and for Pop Art he had 'little sympathy.'<sup>14</sup> Kitaj is positioned in terms of a historical continuum, little swayed by the contemporary world around him. As with other publications, the artist and his work are viewed very firmly in relation to the ideas then of greatest concern to him.

In addition to his monograph, Livingstone has been editor of two exhibition catalogues with themes relevant to the present discussion: *RB Kitaj: An American in Europe* and *Kitaj: Portrait of a Hispanist*. In addition to essays by Livingstone, which

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<sup>12</sup> John Ashbery, 'Hunger and Love in their Variations', in Shannon, *Kitaj: Paintings, Drawings, Pastels*, 13.

<sup>13</sup> Marco Livingstone, *Kitaj* (London: Phaidon Press, 2013) 20.

<sup>14</sup> Livingstone, *Kitaj*, 21.

follow a similar path to his monograph, these publications have contributions from other authors containing more fruitfully analytical or speculative material. Both, for instance, include essays by Francisco Javier San Martín.

In *An American in Europe*, San Martín locates Kitaj's approach to Europe historically not as a list of illustrious forbears but in terms of loss or a search for something not to be found at home:

Many Americans came to Europe to experience the fascination of history, the versatility of a culture in which the past lives alongside the present with an ease unheard of in their country. More than one was attracted by the fascination of ruin, that melancholic sediment of the past, that romantic space for which there is no place on the prairies of the Midwest.<sup>15</sup>

He amplifies this point when discussing the School of London, a term that:

did not refer merely to the location of the painters that formed it, but indirectly to their European roots – the cultural *density* of the Old Europe – in place of more typically American forms such as Minimalism and New York Pop, that were paradigms of the 'American way of Life'.<sup>16</sup>

In *Portrait of a Hispanist*, San Martín draw analogies with a wider, and more surprising, range of artists than are usually associated with Kitaj, in order to make some pertinent observations on his work. For instance, whilst acknowledging the differences between them, he sees some analogies between the work of Kitaj and Oskar Schlemmer's *Fensterbilder*, made towards the end of his life, in which he aimed at an art:

... devoted to unravelling the tragedy of contemporary history through intimate experiences.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Francisco Javier San Martín, 'RB Kitaj, Homage to Catalonia' in Marco Livingstone (ed.), *RB Kitaj: An American in Europe* (Oslo: Astrup Fearnley Museet for Moderne Kunst, 1998), 126.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 134.

<sup>17</sup> Francisco Javier San Martín, 'The Art of Politics, The Politics of Intimacy,' in Marco Livingstone, *Portrait of a Hispanist* (Bilbao: Museo de Bellas Artes de Bilbao, 2004), 135.

Richard Morphet's *RB Kitaj: A Retrospective* was published in 1994 to accompany the survey exhibition he curated at the Tate Gallery. The book follows the standard format for exhibition catalogues – Shannon's for instance. It contains two essays, one by Morphet, the other by philosopher Richard Wollheim; an extended interview with Kitaj conducted by Morphet; a chronology; and a series of Kitaj's prefaces.

As with Livingstone, the book is largely descriptive and eschews theory. In particular it focuses very much on the personality of Kitaj. Morphet's biographical essay is a fair-minded, solid account of the artist's development with plenty of context given. Ultimately, in Morphet's view, Kitaj is an artist of contradictions and tensions. But this is precisely what fuels his work.

This partiality of Kitaj's to unpredictability is part of his wish as an artist to be able to escape restrictions and to take on anything at will. That wish is, in turn, inseparable from his need to be several people simultaneously – American and European, traditionalist and modernist, painter, sensualist and writer, celebrant and melancholic, settled and rootless. The strengths of his art are, in a sense, powered by the very unresolvability of such oppositions<sup>18</sup>

Clearly, there is an attempt to assert a certain image here – one deeply rooted in the personality of the artist. We see certain lineages being mapped out. In 1954, he:

Discovered Cecil Court, Charing Cross Road and Blackwell's bookshop in their prime. Attracted about this time to Berenson's books, which led him to Sassetta, Lotto and the Venetians. First struck by Sickert, at the Tate, 'and I have never tired of him'.

'In their prime', said of the bookshops, implies nostalgia for what they are no longer. It suggests a native conservatism, which the Chronology tends to reinforce. Sassetta and Lotto are both significant painters of the Italian Renaissance, but hardly household names, so subtly underlining Kitaj's knowledge of the byways of art

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<sup>18</sup> Richard Morphet, *RB Kitaj: A Retrospective* (London: Tate Gallery, 1994) 32.



history and, at the same time, suggesting a lineage, the art DNA passed on to the artist, by way of Sickert, whom he sees at the Tate Gallery, the very institution now displaying his work. The direct quote from reinforces the importance of Sickert for Kitaj.

German curator, Eckhart Gillen's *Obsessions: RB Kitaj 1932-2007* is the catalogue written to accompany the most extensive retrospective of the artist yet staged. It opened at the Jewish Museum, Berlin, in 2012 before touring to the UK (where it was divided between the Jewish Museum, London, and Pallant House, Chichester) and, finally, to Hamburg Kunsthalle.<sup>19</sup> The book contains essays by eight authors. Understandably, given the remit of the organising institution, these are weighted towards Jewish themes. This does, however, tend to create a critical bias towards the later, more explicitly Jewish paintings Kitaj made from the late-70s onwards.

Gillen had access to the Kitaj Papers stored at UCLA and is able to draw upon the wealth of primary source material they contain, including Kitaj's *Confessions*. Some of this material has been made available to contributing authors, making all of the essays, for the first time in an exhibition catalogue, feel weighty and well-researched. Gillen's own essay follows a familiar biographical path. However, the narrative is divided into sections which describe the development of the Jewish themes in Kitaj's art, weaving them in particular images as appropriate. The artist's diaries and other private writings are quoted extensively in order to bolster a particular point. Although this provides tremendous amounts of new, and valuable information about Kitaj's thinking, it does not, on reflection, tell us much about the art. In fact, the paintings are

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<sup>19</sup> A modified version of the catalogue was published (in German only) to coincide with the Hamburg leg of the tour. The book contains an extra essay by Hubertus Gaßner, 'Magie und Logik: Kitaj malt Aby Warburg.'

often dealt with in one or two sentences, many of which merely describe the image.

‘Along with a human head’, he writes of the epic 1976 canvas *If Not, Not*:

the ruins of civilization float on the oil-sullied waters of a river. Above the miserable scene, like the gates to Hell, towers the gatehouse at Auschwitz.<sup>20</sup>

He goes on to describe how the composition breaks down ‘into countless individual scenes and incoherent fragments’.

Of the other essays, Edward Chaney’s discussion of Kitaj’s interest in the work of the Warburg Institute sheds new light on his relationship to Edgar Wind and other Warburg scholars, such as Ernst Gombrich. Cilly Kugelman interviews Richard Morphet in an attempt to understand the caustic atmosphere that enveloped the Tate Gallery’s retrospective. Art historian, Martin Roman Deppner recounts his curatorial work with Kitaj in Germany and the artist’s assistant, Tracy Bartley, describes his daily routine in Los Angeles. There is analysis of Kitaj’s *Diasporist Manifestos* by Inka Bertz, and of his relationship with the practice and theology of Judaism by Michal Friedlander. This latter essay is revealing. For instance, it seems the rabbi at Bevis Marks, the synagogue in the City of London where Kitaj married Sandra Fisher, had insisted the artist prove he was Jewish according to the ‘normative religious statutes of Jewish Orthodoxy.’<sup>21</sup> Apparently, this was a protracted procedure. Tellingly, ‘Kitaj did not recover from his anger and shock at the process,’ writes Friedlander, ‘nor did it warm him to institutionalised religion.’<sup>22</sup>

Still the most analytical book on Kitaj, especially in regard to his engagement with themes around European history, identity and exile, is *Critical Kitaj* edited by James Aulich and John Lynch. As with most of the literature under discussion, the book is a

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<sup>20</sup> Eckhart Gillen, *RB Kitaj 1932-2007: Obsessions* (Bielefeld: Kerber Verlag, 2012), 93.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 192.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 192.

collection of essays by multiple authors. David Peters Corbett and John Lynch both discuss the relation of image and text in Kitaj. For both writers this represents a hierarchical conflict, which prioritises language over image. Their position, which seems to be based on the idea of the autonomous image, may be seen as rooted in the very modernist debates Kitaj sought to challenge. This is complicated further by the artist's habit of commenting on his work at a later point. Lynch sees this as a case of Kitaj trying to 'close down' the polyvalency he had originally sought to promote.<sup>23</sup>

Simon Faulkner's 'The History Behind the Surface: RB Kitaj and the Spanish Civil War', a sustained analysis of the 1962 canvas *Kennst du das Land?* frames the painting within the context of late-modernist debates. He pays particular attention to the all over whiteness of the image locating this, as practice, temporarily not only post-Abstract Expressionism but post-Rauschenberg and Johns. 'Kitaj's painting,' he argues:

was thus defined by an awareness of modernist painting since Abstract Expressionism and of the limitations such practices placed upon critical thought and potential content.<sup>24</sup>

This point is amplified with regard to Kitaj's position within his immediate artistic context. Faulkner correctly identifies the 'critical relationship' these early works take up with regard to the 'anti-literariness of the forms of abstract art supported by [...] Clement Greenberg in the United States and Lawrence Alloway in England.'<sup>25</sup> He goes on to argue that:

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<sup>23</sup> John Lynch, 'The Murder of Rosa Luxemburg: Monuments, Documents, Meanings,' in James Aulich and John Lynch, *Critical Kitaj* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 67.

<sup>24</sup> Simon Faulkner, 'The History Beneath the Surface: RB Kitaj and the Spanish Civil War,' in Aulich and Lynch, *Critical Kitaj*, 136-137.

<sup>25</sup> Faulkner, *Critical Kitaj*, 112.

The historicity of [the painting's] images fights it out with the powerful associations all-over whiteness had with claims to artistic ahistoricity and disinterestedness within the context of postwar modernism.<sup>26</sup>

There is, I think, an important point here: that Kitaj was arguing against pure formalism in art. This is something I will examine throughout the course of this thesis. Also worth noting is Faulkner's identification of nostalgia within these works. Kitaj's 'nostalgic optic,' he writes, 'was central to his early self-formation as an artist.'<sup>27</sup> Nostalgia, as it relates to Kitaj, is a topic I will consider more fully in chapter 1.

A word here about not a book but a paper: in 'Art and the Conditions of Exile', Linda Nochlin considers the impact of expatriation on the work of a number of artists. These include Shirley Jaffe, Zuka Mitelberg, Leonora Carrington, Remedios Varo and Kitaj (the only male artist examined in any detail). Nochlin is not so much interested in identifying general principles, rather she is concerned with the significance of gender in negotiating exile. As she puts it, what she wished to examine was 'diversity rather than unity in the production of the exiled or expatriated artist.'<sup>28</sup>

Nochlin contends that exile for Kitaj, at least as it is expressed in his work, is a male condition. She locates this specifically within his depictions of women, wherein they are largely seen as subjects of 'a dominant male subjectivity, for the pleasure and instruction of a male audience.'<sup>29</sup> In fact, for all his efforts to articulate a commonality of exile, implicitly in his art and explicitly in his notion of diasporism, he creates a further exile: 'there is an exile within the exile so poignantly enacted in Kitaj's

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<sup>26</sup> Faulkner, *Critical Kitaj*, 137.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 118.

<sup>28</sup> Nochlin, 'Art and the Conditions of Exile: Men/Women, Emigration/Expatriation' in *Poetics Today*, vol. 17, no. 3, Autumn 1996, 317.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 327.

images: the exile of women.<sup>30</sup> Nochlin's essay came to my attention only recently, and consequently I have not been able to fully address her points at length throughout the thesis. However, some questions relevant to her position are addressed in chapter 2 where I discuss Kitaj's work in relation to the *Lustmord* genre in 1920s Germany.

Janet Wolf, writing in *Critical Kitaj*, takes a more sympathetic approach to Kitaj's depiction of women. Consider her remark: 'It would be quite wrong to accuse Kitaj of a generalised masculinism and misogyny in his work, even in his 'diasporist' work; for example, the figure of Joe Singer, his archetypal Jew, is far more like the traditional 'feminine' scholarly Jew discussed by Boyarin than his conflicted twentieth-century counterpart (the typical Roth protagonist).'<sup>31</sup>

Nochlin's assessment of *Autumn of Central Paris (after Walter Benjamin)* has resonances with this thesis in that it refers to Kitaj's nostalgia for a lost modernist Europe. In this painting, she writes:

Kitaj again emphasizes the signifiers of exile, alienation and breakup in the visual structure of the canvas ... Disjunction rules everywhere, alienation is borrowed from specifically French sources: the figure marking the back plane to the right wanders off into ominous blankness like the figure in the rear of Cezanne's eerie *Picnic*. The whole work is redolent of Manet's *Concert at the Tuileries*, which was, after all, an homage to the creative Paris of the Second Empire, but it projects an image of the intellectual life of the city now abjected, ominous, torn apart.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Nochlin, *Poetics Today*, 327.

<sup>31</sup> Janet Wolf in Aulich and Lynch, *Critical Kitaj*, 2000, 40.

<sup>32</sup> Nochlin, *Poetics Today*, 323.

For Nochlin, this canvas is ‘one of his finest, most moving and ... most nostalgia-producing.’<sup>33</sup> Interestingly, although she remarks on its emotional impact, she does not pursue the idea of nostalgia as, in itself, having relevance to the condition of exile. However, ‘he avoids the economic basis of Benjamin’s analysis of alienation – capitalism and the cult of commodity simply do not play a role in Kitaj’s sense of modernity...’<sup>34</sup>

Also of interest to the present discussion is Livingstone’s article, ‘Iconology as Theme in the Early Work of R. B. Kitaj’. This essay appeared in the *Burlington* magazine in July 1980. This text provides a fairly substantial discussion of Kitaj’s engagement with *The Journals of the Warburg and Courtauld Institute* and addresses the artist’s use of texts and makes a strong case for the significance of iconological ideas within his work. It does not, however, push further into the implications for Kitaj’s work of Aby Warburg’s own ideas, particularly with regard to the irrational beneath the rational surface of civilization. I will explore this further in chapter 2, when discussing the early canvases *The Murder of Rosa Luxemburg* and *The Red Banquet*.

Thinking about Faulkner’s concept of Kitaj’s ‘nostalgic optic’ is what prompted the title of this thesis, that the artist was projecting a fantasy, an idea of Europe.<sup>35</sup> Richard Wollheim, writing in Morphet’s *RB Kitaj: a Retrospective*, has, perhaps, best outlined the nature of this fantasy, writing of:

that legendary metropolis, of that mechanised Babylon, where all the great writers and painters, and all the great idlers and noctambulists, and all the great madams and their clients, real and fictional, of the last hundred years and

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<sup>33</sup> Nochlin, *Poetics Today*, 322.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 323.

<sup>35</sup> Simon Faulkner, ‘The history behind the surface: RB Kitaj and the Spanish Civil War’, in James Aulich and John Lynch, *Critical Kitaj* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 118.

more, would have been equally at home: where Baudelaire might have strolled with Svevo, and Walter Benjamin had a drink with Polly Adler, and John Ashbery written poetry at a café table, and where Cavafy and Proust and Pavese could have negotiated with Jupien for the sexual favours they craved.<sup>36</sup>

Wollheim, in passing, puts his finger on the nature of Kitaj's Europe, I feel, when he writes of the painter collecting books 'like the marbles that an eighteenth century traveller might have brought back from the Grand Tour.'<sup>37</sup> Moreover, Kitaj's Romance of Europe is expressed again in the attitudes regarding his close friends: 'to this very day, Kitaj will talk of his two great friends, Freud and Auerbach, as born within the charmed world of European art, and, by implication, of himself as brought up outside it.'<sup>38</sup> This, telling as it is, nevertheless reveals the imprint of the artist. As with much of the literature discussed in this section, many of its assumptions are based on a reading of this later, post-*The Human Clay*, Kitaj.

One could characterise Kitaj's fascination with Europe in the following way: his biography provides an impetus; his American cultural background, in its broadest sense, provides a rationale. In discussion with Morphet, the artist proposed that:

... the fundamental identity you ask about turns out to be my own predicament, which I try to address by painting, not things, but *about* things which interest me, often fantasies I chase after. Yes, my American-European-English predicament interests me so much I pray all its unhinged inflections will cough up universal pictures from time to time.<sup>39</sup>

This foregrounding of Kitaj the artist helps to situate the work within a biographical context. This can be valuable. Given his Jewish family history we can then better

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<sup>36</sup> Richard Wollheim, 'Kitaj: Recollections and Reflections' in Richard Morphet, *RB Kitaj: a Retrospective* (London: Tate Gallery, 1994), 39.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>39</sup> Morphet, *RB Kitaj: a Retrospective*, 43.

understand some, at least, of the personal motivators for his interest in European history and, particularly Jewish history. Nevertheless, few commentators have pushed further, and attempted more sustained readings, however tentative, of specific works. The only publication to do so at any length currently available is Aulich and Lynch's *Critical Kitaj* of 2000.

This strong emphasis on the biography means we tend to see the work in terms of the man. It becomes emblematic, even symptomatic of his identity and situation, whether this is characterised generally as 'exile' or specifically as 'American abroad' or 'Jewish'. Instructive though this can be I am more interested in attempting to read the works themselves. I do want to know what Kitaj had to say but only in so far as it gives me a purchase on the work at hand. Moreover, with the exception of working documents, such as his letters to Chris Prater, most of Kitaj's texts were written in relation to and as extensions of the work. They need to be considered more as part of the content and less as disinterested exegesis.

I have employed these texts extensively, not because I want to privilege Kitaj as the chief authority on his work, but because I want to exploit the inconsistencies and conflicts in his thinking that they reveal. The aim is to achieve a fuller understanding of the paintings, prints and work in other media. The conflicts revealed may suggest a desire on the part of the artist to maintain control of the meaning; or, on the other, they may suggest an urge to maintain a fluidity of meaning.



## Chapter 1

### AMERICANS IN EUROPE

*European: one who is nostalgic for Europe.*<sup>40</sup>

RB Kitaj's fascination with Europe, or an idea of Europe, is by no means unique amongst Americans. In one sense, the United State of America can be seen as European, in that its cultural foundations were built on those of successive waves of European settlers. In his lecture, *Philosophy and the Crisis of European Man*, philosopher Edmund Husserl proposed the idea that the term European meant the culture derived from the philosophy of the Ancient Greeks and could be applied to any offshoot, regardless of geography. 'We may ask,' he wrote:

How is the spiritual image of Europe to be characterized? This does not mean Europe geographically, as it appears on maps, as though European man were to be in this way confined to the circle of those who live together in this territory. In the spiritual sense it is clear that to Europe belong the English dominions, the United States, etc...<sup>41</sup>

The dialogue between the cultures of Europe and America is a long and continuing one. For Europeans it was not until the 20<sup>th</sup> century that America really became a source of imagery and subject matter, although there are exceptions: 19<sup>th</sup> century figures like the painter Thomas Moran or the photographer Eadweard Muybridge being notable examples. For Americans, on the other hand, Europe has been a cultural magnet since before the Declaration of Independence in 1776.

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<sup>40</sup> Milan Kundera, *The Art of the Novel* (London: Faber and Faber, 1988, revised 2005) 129.

<sup>41</sup> Edmund Husserl, *Phenomenology and The Crisis of Philosophy*, translated and edited by Quentin Lauer (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 155.

Amongst visual artists, Benjamin West was the first American painter of significance to make his mark on the London art world. West moved to England in 1763. He became one of the driving forces behind the foundation of the Royal Academy, was appointed painter to the court of George III and, in 1792, was elected the second President of the RA. However, his first port of call, after leaving America in 1760, was Italy. At that time, artists, writers and wealthy collectors from across Europe flocked to Italy in order to contemplate the ruins of ancient Rome and to study classical sculpture, such as the Apollo Belvedere, preserved in museums. Rome was considered the wellspring of the Renaissance and the example of classical culture was the benchmark by which contemporary work was then judged, although there were certainly debates about how slavish it should be copied. If West came to Europe seeking the source of what was then considered high culture, it could also be argued that, in leaving America, he was fleeing a cultural backwater. His friend, the painter John Singleton Copley, wrote to West that in America there was not a single portrait ‘worthy to be called a picture.’<sup>42</sup>

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, James Abbott McNeil Whistler, Mary Cassatt and John Singer Sargent followed West’s example in moving to Europe. Although Whistler’s primary motivation may have been to gain first hand experience of both the Old and New Masters, he also undoubtedly expected to find, when he arrived in Paris, *la vie de Bohème* of garret life, i.e. a moral looseness of smoking, drinking and sex, and this is reflected in his drawings of the time.<sup>43</sup> In other words, he sought a distinct contrast to the Puritan strain to be found within American culture. This was, perhaps, compounded by a climate of anti-intellectualism that sidelined the visual arts,

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<sup>42</sup> Peter Selz, ‘Americans Abroad’ in CM Joachimides and N Rosenthal (eds.) *American Art in the 20th Century: Painting and Sculpture 1913-1993* (Munich: Prestel Verlag, 1993), 177.

<sup>43</sup> MF MacDonald, ‘Whistler: Painting the Man’, *Whistler, Women & Fashion*, edited by SG Galassi (Yale University Press, New Haven, Connecticut, 2003), 7.

furthering the problem about which Copley had earlier complained to West. As Peter Selz puts it:

American artists had to cope with a congeries of adversity in the nineteenth century. The work of the carpenter and the artisan was more highly valued than the rarefied pursuits of the arts; and egalitarian sensibility in the new republic found it hard to give special respect to artistic talent; and an ingrained Puritan tradition regarded the sensuous aspects of the visual arts with suspicion.<sup>44</sup>

Echoes of this mindset are perceptible even today. In a recent interview the artist, John Currin, explained his approach in the following way:

The work is based on an ill-informed, romantic fantasy about Europe. As an American painter I have insecurities about my own legitimacy since, throughout history, painting has been done at a higher level in Europe – our entire environment is full of references to and quotations from European culture.<sup>45</sup>

Europe, then, is seen in terms of Romance, a romantic fantasy that contrasts America unfavourably with Europe, the culture of which pervades the ‘entire environment’. These are sentiments with which Copley would, presumably, have sympathised. Currin goes on to observe that, in America, a nude is automatically ‘rude’ – a lingering example of the already noted Puritanism within American culture. Kitaj’s turning ‘forward not back’ to the drawing board in the early-1970s and dismissal of much of his early work, such as the silkscreen prints of the 1960s, was, I believe, motivated by a similar attitude to John Currin’s. The adoption of an apparently conservative figure drawing style was, arguably, a means to engage with, to seek the legitimacy and authority of the great tradition of European culture and to place

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<sup>44</sup> Selz, *American Art in the 20th Century: Painting and Sculpture 1913-1993*, 177.

<sup>45</sup> Sarah Kent, ‘John Currin: The Art of Porn,’ *Art World*, Issue 5, June/July (2008), 119-120.

himself in relation to it. As Joe Shannon wrote in 1981: 'He sought a certain pedigree, wanting to join a line that leads back to the Renaissance and earlier.'<sup>46</sup>

It was not only American painters who were drawn to Europe. Writers, too, have been crossing the Atlantic since the earliest years of the USA. The idea of a transatlantic pilgrimage features in the work of writers as diverse as Washington Irving, Nathaniel Hawthorne, James Fennimore Cooper, Herman Melville, Mark Twain, and Henry James in the 19<sup>th</sup>, and Ezra Pound, TS Eliot, Ernest Hemingway, Gertrude Stein and Hilda Doolittle in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. During the 1960s, the novelist William Burroughs worked for a time in London, as did younger American poets associated with Black Mountain College, including close friends of Kitaj such as Jonathan Williams and Robert Creeley.

It seems that, for many Americans, products of a state founded on Puritan principles, with an egalitarian approach to culture, Europe combines refinement, high culture and history with moral decadence and doubt. Hawthorne, for instance, who travelled extensively in Europe and lived in Liverpool as US Consul General, wrote a series of sketches on England, which were collected as *Our Old Home*, the title acknowledging the cultural roots of many Americans. His final novel, *The Marble Faun*, published in 1860, is set in a degenerate Italy and contrasts the behaviour of its morally naïve American characters with the decadent aesthetes of Rome. In his preface to the manuscript Hawthorne sums up the nature of the issue with these telling remarks:

Italy, [...] was chiefly valuable to him as affording a sort of poetic or fairy precinct, where actualities would not be so terribly insisted upon as they are, and must needs be, in America. No author [...] can conceive the difficulty of writing a romance about a country where there is no shadow, no mystery, no picturesque and gloomy wrong, nor anything but a commonplace prosperity, in broad and simple daylight as there is happily the case with my dear native

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<sup>46</sup> Shannon, *RB Kitaj: Paintings, Drawings, Pastels*, 28.

land [...] Romance and poetry, ivy, lichens, and wallflowers, need ruin to make them grow.<sup>47</sup>

It hardly needs to be pointed out that, when he published this, the United States of America was still heavily dependant on slave labour and less than a year away from civil war.

### Young Americans in Europe post-Second World War

The long history of American artists and writers living and working in Europe provides a historic model for Kitaj's own forays outside the United States and, in some cases, notably those of Pound and Eliot, he openly acknowledges their example.<sup>48</sup> This branch of Kitaj's artistic family tree is familiar enough from the existing literature. But one consequence of this emphasis on the historical is that it tends to present Kitaj in isolation, as if he were a special case. In fact, the focus on earlier exemplars overlooks the fact that he was just one of numerous Americans engaged in cultural dialogue with Europe post-Second World War. And to better understand the immediate context for his early artistic development it is worth considering other young American artists who made the journey to Europe in the late 1940s and 50s.

Although, in the post-war years, the artistic centre of power was shifting to New York, with the emergence of Abstract Expressionism, Paris retained its significance sufficiently to attract young artists not only from the United States but from around the world. In 1948, Ellsworth Kelly, then heavily influenced by Max Beckmann, travelled to Paris and Colmar, where he saw Matthias Grünewald's *Isenheim Altarpiece*. That same year, Robert Rauschenberg was in the French capital, studying

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<sup>47</sup> Nathaniel Hawthorne, 'Author's Preface', *The Marble Faun*, (<http://www.eldritchpress.org/nh/mfpf.html>, accessed 2.1.2016).

<sup>48</sup> Morphet, *RB Kitaj: A Retrospective*, 44.

at the Académie Julián. The following year, Shirley Jaffe also crossed the Atlantic to study in Paris, where she would subsequently spend much of her working life. It was around this period, too, that Joan Mitchell took advantage of a \$2000 travel fellowship to study in Paris and Provence.<sup>49</sup> Other artists came from beyond the USA. Canadian painter Jean-Paul Riopelle came to Paris in 1947; and Brazilian sculptor Lygia Clark studied in Paris, with Fernand Léger, between 1950 and 1952. But Paris was not the only city attracting American art students. In 1948, Robert Congdon arrived in Venice and subsequently spent the bulk of his working life in Italy. And two years later, Cy Twombly, recipient of a travelling fellowship from the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, sailed east, bound for Rome, in the company of Robert Rauschenberg, a close friend and fellow student at Black Mountain College. Twombly would settle permanently in the Italian capital, in 1957. Kitaj travelled further east but even he was not the only American in Vienna. By his own admission, one of his closest friends in the Austrian capital was an American, Frederick Sprague.<sup>50</sup>

Shirley Jaffe went to France because of her husband who, like Kitaj, made use of the GI Bill to study abroad. He wanted to study at the Sorbonne, so Jaffe went with him and they ‘ended up in Paris.’<sup>51</sup> Discussing this period of her life in 2004, Jaffe provides an illuminating vignette of international artistic connections in 1950s Paris:

... there were artists from Japan, artists from Latin America, a lot of American and French artists. Most of them are unknown now, though Sam Francis came

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<sup>49</sup> Linda Nochlin, oral history interview with Joan Mitchell, April 16, 1986, <http://joanmitchellfoundation.org/work/artist/on-joan/interviews/oral-history-interview-with-joan-mitchell-1986-apr.-16> accessed 21.7.2016. See also ‘Joan Mitchell: A Painter Under the Influences’ *Los Angeles Times*, April 26, 1994, [http://articles.latimes.com/1994-04-26/entertainment/ca-50424\\_1\\_joan-mitchell](http://articles.latimes.com/1994-04-26/entertainment/ca-50424_1_joan-mitchell) accessed 21.7.2016.

<sup>50</sup> Timothy Hyman and RB Kitaj ‘A Return to London,’ interview in Shannon, *Kitaj: Paintings, Drawings, Pastels*, 42.

<sup>51</sup> Shirley Kaneda, ‘Shirley Jaffe’ in *BOMB – Artists in Conversation*, Spring 2004, <http://bombmagazine.org/article/2629/> accessed 21.7.2016.

around '51 or '52, and Joan Mitchell had already been there and would come back later, Jean-Paul Riopelle was there: a Canadian artist, one of the most generous artists I have known. There were other French Canadians too. And there was Alicia Penalba; Imai and Domoto, Japanese artists; Ellsworth Kelly, whom I didn't know; Jack Youngerman, a close friend of mine; Zuka Middleberg [sic], who also had come very early and has continued to live in Paris; Hugh Weiss; Charlie Semser. There was also a little group of black artists: Bill Rivers, Ed Clark. There was a going and coming that was vital, a cultural exchange that was very lively.<sup>52</sup>

Twombly's urge to go to Italy was fuelled, rather like Benjamin West's two hundred years earlier, by a desire to experience European culture at first-hand and in-depth. He was explicit about this in his application for the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts fellowship, explaining that the funding:

... would enable me to go to Europe to come in direct contact with sculpture, painting and architecture in context. To experience European cultural climates both intellectual and aesthetic. I will be able to study the prehistoric cave drawings of Lascaux (the first great art of Western civilisation). The French, Dutch and Italian Museums, the Gothic, Baroque architecture, and Roman ruins.<sup>53</sup>

As Nicholas Cullinan has revealed, Twombly's fascination with the monuments of ancient Rome was not shared by his travelling companion, Rauschenberg. Rather than haunting Rome's museums, he took his camera and documented the quotidian post-Second World War city around him.<sup>54</sup> Nevertheless, allusions to the Italian art he and Twombly saw in the museums of Rome, Florence, Siena and Venice would surface in the Combines and screenprint paintings Rauschenberg subsequently produced in the 1950s and 60s.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Shirley Kaneda, 'Shirley Jaffe' in *BOMB – Artists in Conversation*, Spring 2004, <http://bombmagazine.org/article/2629/> accessed 21.7.2016.

<sup>53</sup> Cy Twombly, statement, Richmond, Library of the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Director's Papers, box 66, quoted in Nicholas Cullinan, 'Double Exposure: Robert Rauschenberg's and Cy Twombly's Roman Holiday', *The Burlington Magazine*, Vol. 150, No. 1264 (July 2008) 461-462.

<sup>54</sup> Nicholas Cullinan, 'Robert Rauschenberg's and Cy Twombly's Roman Holiday' in *The Burlington Magazine*, vol. 150, no. 1264 (July 2008), 464.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 463.

### Kitaj in Vienna

Kitaj's family background was, like that of so many Americans, European. The family of his mother, Jeanne Brooks, were Russian Jews and his father, Sigmund Benway, was Hungarian. Kitaj was born in Cleveland, Ohio, a city that, in 1920, had the largest population of Hungarians outside Budapest.<sup>56</sup>

On the occasion of his Tate retrospective, Kitaj described his own childhood as:

Smalltown life; constant drawing, baseball and movies; poring over art books and magazines like *Life*; first book collecting which would grow into a disease.<sup>57</sup>

This sounds idyllic, as it is surely meant to. In all of his published statements about his childhood and youth Kitaj evokes the same vision of regular America. And yet it cannot have been quite like that. His biological father had abandoned the family when the boy Kitaj was only two years old and it would be seven years before his mother remarried, meaning she was a working single mother during the Great Depression. When she remarried, it was to émigré Austrian chemist, Dr Walter Kitaj, who had fled Europe to escape the Nazis. Later, after the war, Dr Kitaj's mother Helene Kitaj joined him in the US, having first managed to find safety in Sweden.<sup>58</sup> Although he seems to have become very close to his stepfather (close enough to adopt his name, in fact, though he never quite dropped the maternal Brooks) and his new relations, one wonders just how easily he adapted to this development in his life. I mention this not to suggest that Kitaj's childhood was more stressful or dysfunctional than anybody else's but simply to show how he projects a romanticised picture of his past.

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<sup>56</sup> Retrieved from [www.cleveland.com/heritage/index.ssf?/heritage/more/hungary/hungary1.html](http://www.cleveland.com/heritage/index.ssf?/heritage/more/hungary/hungary1.html) 22.08.2008.

<sup>57</sup> Morphet, *RB Kitaj: A Retrospective*, 57.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.



Furthermore, there are, in any case, two ways to view this vision of Americana: an alternative reading might argue that ‘smalltown life’ was something to escape from.

In the aftermath of the Second World War, the USA settled down into a conservative, conformist culture. This was the new geo-political landscape of the Cold War, of McCarthyism. As Douglas Tallack has written:

Compared with the exuberance of the American 1920s, the individual and collective dramas of the Depression and wartime years, and the radicalism of the 1960s, the middle years of the century come down to us in images of conformity and excessive materialism. Here was a stereotypical America, self-satisfied and ready to export its representations of affluence globally. Even what passed for popular exposés of everyday life in the 1950s [...] seem to be fascinated by suburban and down-town life-styles, peer group behaviour and advertising.<sup>59</sup>

And, whilst this view needs to be tempered with the examples of Abstract Expressionism, the Beats, Black Mountain College, Rock and Roll and a host of other pioneering outpourings of creativity, their very non-conformity may in part be considered a reaction to the social circumstances from which they emerged.

A concern with the history of the European Left is apparent throughout Kitaj’s oeuvre, especially in the 1960s. What is interesting is that Kitaj appears to focus on historical moments of the Left and hardly at all on the political events unfolding around him, at least not overtly. However, his tendency to aggregate and compress content, often obscuring the constituent elements behind layers of erudite allusion, does not mean that Kitaj’s work is oblivious to the contemporary. On the contrary, I think the geo-political world of the Cold War – which literally divided the Europe in which he lived and was itself an outcome of the Second World War – informs much of his output but it is dealt with obliquely, in terms of its historical antecedents, the

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<sup>59</sup> Douglas Tallack, ‘Culture, Politics and Society in Mid-Century America’ in Joachimides and Rosenthal, *American Art in the 20th Century: Painting and Sculpture 1913-1993* (Munich: Prestel Verlag, 1993), 29.

‘gloomy wrongs,’ as Hawthorne might have described them, of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

According to James Aulich, the young Kitaj was spoonfed tales of anarchist activity in Austria by his stepfather and of the Spanish Civil War by some of his mother’s friends who had fought on the Republican side.<sup>60</sup> This, I think, provided considerable personal stimulus for Kitaj’s engagement with Europe, one given intellectual reinforcement by his subsequent reading of authors such as Hemingway, and his awareness of the long tradition of trans-Atlantic exchange. It is not a coincidence that the first place he headed for on reaching Europe was Austria, for instance. Having sailed across the Atlantic in 1951, he did not stay in Paris, as so many of his compatriots did (though he did pass through, stopping long enough to have his photograph taken in front of the Louvre) but instead boarded the Orient Express and made for the Vienna.<sup>61</sup> Within a month of arriving there he had enrolled for a period of study at the Akademie der Bildenden Künste, a move prompted by his step-grandmother, Helene Kitaj, who had inherited part-ownership of a chemist’s shop in the city.<sup>62</sup> Unlike most of his fellow Americans – Cy Twombly, say, or Joan Mitchell – rather than relying on a grant to fund his travels, the young artist got by on his savings from working as a seaman and on a small allowance made available to him in the Austrian capital.<sup>63</sup> This period represents Kitaj’s first sustained engagement with the real Europe, rather than the Europe of books or family reminiscence.

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<sup>60</sup> James Aulich, ‘The difficulty of living in age of cultural decline and spiritual corruption: R.B. Kitaj 1965-70’ *Oxford Art Journal*, 10, no. 2 (1987): 56.

<sup>61</sup> Morphet, *RB Kitaj: A Retrospective*, 57.

<sup>62</sup> Eckhart Gillen, ‘RB Kitaj – Secret Jew and Avowed Diasporist’ in *Obsessions: RB Kitaj 1932-2007*, edited by Eckhart Gillen (Berlin: Kerber Art & Jewish Museum Berlin, 2012), 87.

<sup>63</sup> David Cohen, *The Viennese Inspiration: In Search of Self*, in *RA: Royal Academy Magazine*, no. 29, Winter (1990): 34-36. Kitaj would use the GI Bill to study in Europe towards the end of the 1950s.

In an interview with Timothy Hyman he described how, in Vienna ‘Very youthful Russian troopers were everywhere with acne and sten guns examining papers.’<sup>64</sup>

Writing in the mid-2000s, he amplified these remarks in a series of further observation about his experiences in the city:

I looked American alright but I also had the facial features of the Russian soldiers guarding Vienna in their zone: young, square, pockmarked, Slavic – the legacy of my Russian forebears and my mother.<sup>65</sup>

Aside from their personal implications, his remarks serve to remind us of the political situation in Vienna at that time. In the aftermath of the Second World War, it was a divided city, every bit as much as Berlin, lying within Soviet-occupied territory, administered by the Allied Commission and split between four zones: Russian, American, British and French. Unlike Berlin, however, the centre was an international sector, run alternately by the four military powers. It was to remain this way for a decade. When Kitaj arrived in Vienna, it was a mere three years after the Berlin Blockade, the first significant Cold War crisis, during which the Soviets, in an attempt to gain control of the city, had attempted to cut off the Western allies’ supply routes. Fears of a similar move on the Austrian capital remained, although the Soviets did not go to anything like the same lengths to impose segregation as they did in Germany. By 1955, they had agreed to withdraw from the territory on condition that permanent political neutrality was enshrined in the constitution of the new sovereign state of Austria. Nevertheless, throughout this period, Vienna was a hotbed of espionage and black-marketeering, much as described in Carol Reed’s film *The Third Man*. This film, released in 1949, provides a context of Romance for Kitaj’s heading to Austria,

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<sup>64</sup> David Cohen, RA: *Royal Academy Magazine*, 41.

<sup>65</sup> RB Kitaj, *Confessions* (unpublished manuscript, 2003-2006) 9. UCLA, RB Kitaj Papers (Collection 1741) Box 5, Folder 1.

rather than anywhere else. And in discussion with Morphet the mature Kitaj presents his Viennese period in such terms:

When I got to Paris at eighteen, on my way to Vienna to study art, I didn't spend much time in the Louvre. I just got on the Orient Express with 'The Third Man' twanging in my mind. Maybe I would meet a Valli or a Moira Shearer. Art and adventure are always confused in my mind and I can't get them sorted out, thank God.<sup>66</sup>

When pressed for more concrete impressions of post-Second World War Austria, for instance in an interview of 1989 with Werner Hanak, he answers by embedding his memories within his more recent preoccupations:

I was very aware that people like me had recently been pulled off the streets I walked on and were taken away to be murdered. But I had very little knowledge of a brilliant pre-war Vienna which I would absorb later in life. I read some Kafka and I remember feeling how 'Kafkaesque' aspects of everyday life were, even though Vienna was not Prague. I did encounter a few lost souls whose lives had been broken by the Shoah, but my intellectual life was not prepared for the stunning drama before the war and the fate of the Jews. I did ponder what roles had been played by people I saw in the streets and on trams and in the Wienerwald, etc, but my grand obsession with personal Jewishness was still asleep.<sup>67</sup>

He continues, again mixing memories with wider historical circumstances, by making the important point that the Holocaust was an event largely unspoken of in the post-war period.

I was dreaming of being an artist and I was a Sleepwalker at that period of my youth. It would be many years before names like Freud, Adler, Mahler, Wittgenstein, Schnitzler, Schönberg, Kraus, Weininger, Eichmann, Stangl, Kaltenbrunner, etc, etc, would enter my intellectual life for better or worse. One must not forget that there were about 20 years of a kind of silence before English books about the Shoah began to be published. Hitlerism was like the Living Dead: unreal, and not yet organized into histories for those like me who had lived in peace. The name of Wiesenthal was unknown to me. These were only shadows and dark corners I would later explore. Anyway, I was mostly interested in art and sex, or sex and art.<sup>68</sup>

<sup>66</sup> Morphet, *RB Kitaj: A Retrospective*, 44.

<sup>67</sup> Werner Hanak, 'Interview with RB Kitaj' in *RB Kitaj: An American in Europe*, edited by Marco Livingstone (Oslo: Astrup Fearnley Museum, 1989), 132.

<sup>68</sup> Hanak in Livingstone, *RB Kitaj: An American in Europe*, 132.

We get some sense of the young artist's immediate impressions of Vienna from a letter he wrote to his mother Jeanne Brooks shortly after arriving in 1950. Written in turquoise ink, on cream paper so thin the words can be read through the back it reveals some of the young Kitaj's immediate responses to the Austrian capital.<sup>69</sup>

When he got to Vienna, he lodged with a friend of his step-grandmother, 'an old girlfriend who lived in the 18<sup>th</sup> District.'<sup>70</sup> If this sounds convenient, the evidence of the letter to his mother suggests otherwise:

just spoke with Mrs Bauer for the first time... she is asking quite a high price for the room – S300 but what can I say to her – I don't want to argue with her...<sup>71</sup>

With regard to the high rent Frau Bauer was charging, Kitaj goes on to say

...it is in line with the national game in Austria (skrew-the-American-for-whatever-you-can-get). You can't possibly realize the extent to which these people go for money.<sup>72</sup>

Indeed not, especially if you are a comfortably-off young American looking for Adventure and Romance. But there was more to Vienna than importunate landladies, as goes on to explain:

I am glad I came here because there are many things in Vienna which an average European tourist doesn't see in other countries: it is obvious that these people have not learned much. [They are] more like criminals who are all-the-more hardened by prison than the 'enlightened' people who were 'led astray' in 1940-45. They dislike foreigners and show it by their stares.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> RB Kitaj, letter to Jeanne Brooks, October 1<sup>st</sup>, no year but circa 1951. UCLA, Kitaj Papers, Box 119, Folder 34.

<sup>70</sup> Jake Auerbach, *Kitaj: In the Picture* (London: Jake Auerbach Films Ltd, 1994), at c.19' 49".

<sup>71</sup> Kitaj, letter to Jeanne Brooks, c. 1951.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

In his interview with Hyman, he discusses his time in Vienna in typically evocative style, describing his difficulties keeping warm and rail journeys to the Salzkammergut and further afield, to Fiume and Trieste. Amongst his closest friends was a fellow American, Frederick Sprague, a Roman Catholic who

... hooked me on his version of art and *almost* converted me to his Church. He got me as far as weekly private sessions with one of the loveliest men I've ever come across, Monsignor Ungar, a leading Roman Catholic scholar in Vienna.<sup>74</sup>

Leopold Ungar (1912-1992) remained a significant figure in the Catholic Church in Austria. The subject of an early Kitaj portrait (fig. 1), he also appears, unnamed, in the Eduardo Paolozzi collaboration, *Work in Progress* (fig. 2). This collage and assemblage consists of a wooden compartmentalised frame in the centre of which is a collage by Kitaj. In the compartments around the edges are insertions by Paolozzi, except for two instances at the top right which contain black and white photographs of the, until now, unidentified priest. Significantly, Leopold Ungar was of Jewish descent and, during the Second World War had fled first to France and subsequently to England to avoid the Nazis. He returned to Austria in 1947, meaning he had been in the country at most three years before Kitaj himself arrived. The fact that Kitaj went to the trouble of attending instruction suggests he took matters of faith seriously or at least that he took his youthful explorations of identity seriously. Nevertheless, he 'really fought for [his] immorality against that regular dosage of received wisdom.'<sup>75</sup> Writing in his unpublished *Confessions* many years later, Kitaj recalled

One of the first things that attracted me about this kindly priest was that the good Monsignore was a Jew.<sup>76</sup>

<sup>74</sup> Kitaj in Shannon, *Kitaj: Paintings, Drawings and Pastels*, 42.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>76</sup> Kitaj cited in Gillen, *RB Kitaj 1932-2009: Obsessions*, 87.

Perhaps this was so, but on the relatively few occasions he discussed Ungar in print, he made no mention of the priest's antecedents. Nevertheless, Ungar embodies a fascinating nexus of European culture. In addition to his own conversion from Judaism to Christianity, his early life was devoted to the study of the Austro-Hungarian writer and satirist Karl Kraus, also Jewish, fiercely assimilationist and an opponent of Zionism. Having renounced Judaism, Kraus was baptised a Catholic in 1911, although he subsequently left the Church in 1923. Kraus was, for many years, something of a role model for Ungar and it may well have been the satirist's example, in addition to the study of philosophy and poetry, which led him to Catholicism.<sup>77</sup> The significance of Ungar, I feel, is that he represents a very early instance of Kitaj gravitating towards a figure whose personal history is profoundly interconnected with the social and political upheavals of his or her time.<sup>78</sup>

### Young Americans in the UK

Kitaj, then, was not the only American-born artist Europe; nor was he the only one in London, certainly not by the 1960s. The sculptor Jann Haworth, a Californian whose father was an Oscar-winning art director, attended the Slade in the early-1960s. She describes her experiences of the city at this time, tellingly, as being like 'a kid in a cultural candy shop'.<sup>79</sup> A key early work by Haworth, *Cowboy* (1964), bears some resemblance to Kitaj's canvas of 1961, *The Bells of Hell* (fig. 3), in its questioning

<sup>77</sup> *Gedenkbuch für die Opfer des Nationalsozialismus an der Universität Wien 1938: Leopold Ungar* [http://gedenkbuch.univie.ac.at/index.php?id=435&no\\_cache=1&no\\_cache=1&person\\_single\\_id=15484&person\\_name=&person\\_geburtstag\\_tag=not\\_selected&person\\_geburtstag\\_monat=not\\_selected&person\\_geburtstag\\_jahr=not\\_selected&person\\_fakultaet=not\\_selected&person\\_kategorie=&person\\_volltextsuche=&search\\_person\\_x=1&result\\_page=139](http://gedenkbuch.univie.ac.at/index.php?id=435&no_cache=1&no_cache=1&person_single_id=15484&person_name=&person_geburtstag_tag=not_selected&person_geburtstag_monat=not_selected&person_geburtstag_jahr=not_selected&person_fakultaet=not_selected&person_kategorie=&person_volltextsuche=&search_person_x=1&result_page=139) accessed 25.10.2015.

<sup>78</sup> Kitaj's dealer Harry Fischer, one of the founders of the Marlborough Gallery, and Josep Vicente Roma, Socialist mayor of Sant Felú de Guixols, are further examples. Even more significant in this regard, perhaps, is Kitaj's own stepfather, Walter Kitaj.

<sup>79</sup> See Battle, in Alexander and Ryan, 116. Haworth's remark is quoted in Zoë Lippett, 'Jann Haworth: I Choose to Cast it in Cloth,' in Ralf Beil and Uta Ruhkamp (eds), *This Was Tomorrow: Pop Art in Great Britain* (Wolfsburg: Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg, 2016) 301.

and deconstructing of one of the myths of the American West. A lifesize figure of a Stetson- and shades-wearing cowboy leaning against a wall, the sculpture clearly draws on Hollywood depictions of the nonchalant gunslinger. But Haworth's cowboy is made of fabric, kapok and calico to be exact, carefully cut, sewn, stuffed and padded. As the calico is uncoloured, the figure is rendered at one and the same time substantial yet ghostly. The qualities of the medium become part of the artist's purpose: the soft materials sag and bulge slightly, making the figure appear just a little awkward. A quintessentially American and male icon, the cowboy is thus subtly recast; he is no longer simply a tough guy but an altogether more vulnerable figure.

The gloved hands of Haworth's cowboy recall the work of another American who was in Britain in the 1960s, the poet Edward Dorn. A student of Charles Olson, he belonged to the circle of writers associated with the Black Mountain School. Kitaj celebrated several of these poets (including Dorn, together with Robert Creeley and Robert Duncan) in the print series *Some Poets*. Dorn came to England in 1965 to teach at Essex University, at the invitation of Donald Davie. Whilst there he began to compose what is arguably his most significant work, the long poem *Gunslinger*. The poem is a psychedelic mock-epic in which the eponymous hero, travels across the American Southwest in search of Howard Hughes. If its search narrative distantly recalls John Ford's epic *The Searchers* of 1956, and indeed many other Westerns, the thrust of the work is very different. The *Gunslinger* is accompanied by a variety of companions, including a talking horse. Along the way, this ragtag crew roll joints and encounters a hitchhiker with a five-gallon gas can of LSD. The character 'I', the narrator of the poem, dies and is embalmed with the LSD, only to reappear later on. It opens with the lines:

I met in Mesilla



The cautious gunslinger  
 Of impeccable personal smoothness  
 And slender leather encased hands  
 Folded casually  
 To make his knock.<sup>80</sup>

Kitaj's *The Bells of Hell* is divided compositionally in two: on the right-hand side is a group of sketchy, distorted figures dispersed in a seemingly random way; on the left, is a US cavalry trooper, complete with ten-gallon hat and toting a six-gun, apparently drawn from a comic-book. It is reproduced in several publications, usually as a detail only, omitting the cartoon-like cowboy to concentrate on the scattered, fragmented figures.<sup>81</sup> These figures derive from drawings of the US dead after the 1876 Battle of the Little Bighorn, made in 1881 by Red Horse, a Minneconjou Lakota Sioux, who took part in the battle. Kitaj had found them reproduced in the pages of a Smithsonian Institution publication (fig. 4). According to Livingstone:

In the *Bells of Hell* (1960) Kitaj quotes literally from the illustrations in the Smithsonian report in order to produce a modern version of a historical narrative picture, one that deals with an actual event – the decimation of Custer's cavalry at the Battle of the Little Bighorn – both through the eyes of contemporary witnesses and from the perspective of an artist living a century later.<sup>82</sup>

The sharp contrast between the square-jawed hero in the white stetson, and the messy aftermath of the US cavalry's most notorious defeat, derived from drawings made by a Lakota Chief, makes for a deeply ironic assessment of the American myth of the West. Despite their obvious differences, all of these works represent a questioning of the history and dominant narratives of the United States of America, through a

<sup>80</sup> Edward Dorn, 'Gunslinger,' in *Collected Poems* (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 2012) 391, lines 1-6.

<sup>81</sup> See for instance Livingstone, *RB Kitaj*, 64, plate 26, and Richard Morphet, *RB Kitaj: A Retrospective*, (London: Tate Gallery, 1994) 40.

<sup>82</sup> Livingstone, *RB Kitaj*, 14.

rethinking of the cowboy and the idea of the 'Wild West'. But while Haworth and Kitaj present distinct approaches to the idea of the lone hero, Kitaj also draws in the position of Native Americans by re-presenting their version of a specific historic event: a tart rejoinder to the comic-book hero he places along side. He would return to the Western theme periodically, for instance the canvases *Horses* (1970), *Western Bathers* (1993-4) and, more obliquely, *John Ford on his Deathbed* (1983-4).

### American Pop/British Pop

Although the younger generation of American artists had been coming to Europe since the early-1950s, it took some time before their British counterparts were able to travel in the opposite direction. Erica Battle, for instance, describes how:

Richard Hamilton set off in the fall of 1963 to see the Marcel Duchamp retrospective curated by Walter Hopps at the Pasadena Art Museum. Allen Jones lived in New York from 1964 to 1965, and Joe Tilson, who visited in 1965 and 1966 and taught at the School of Visual Arts, made works directly in relation to his time there. Gerald Laing and Peter Phillips spent nearly two years, between 1964 and 1966, in New York; there they engaged in a market-research-based project titled *Hybrid* that melded performance and object making. Colin Self spent three months of 1962 in the United States, hitchhiking as the Cuban missile crisis unfolded in October. And after their joint trip in 1961, both Hockney and Apple resettled in the United States – Hockney in California and Apple in New York.<sup>83</sup>

Kitaj and his RCA contemporaries represent a later iteration of British Pop, one with marked differences from the first wave, represented by the Independent Group and figures such as Richard Hamilton and Eduardo Paolozzi. Battle has analysed this distinction in terms of the practical demands made on this second generation by the Royal College Art:

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<sup>83</sup> Erica Battle, 'A Nostalgia for Now: British Pop and the New Immediacy of Cultural Memory' in Darsie Alexander and Bartholemew Ryan (eds), *International Pop* (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 2015) 117-118.

Perhaps one reason British Pop is typically split along two timelines is that the late 1950s and early 1960s represented a marked shift away from the Independent Group's cerebral wrestling with Pop as an idea that could be expressed in exhibition form or in critical exegesis and toward the pictorial modes of painting and sculpture. While the 1960s artists actively exchanged ideas and information, the practical reality of being students required to produce work in the painting track at the Royal College provoked a visual response to the times as much as, or perhaps more than, any dialogue.<sup>84</sup>

What struck Hamilton, the British artist who perhaps came closest in his work to the detachment of American Pop, most forcibly about the Americans:

was their throwaway attitude to Art – a point of view which the European, with his long tradition of the seriousness of culture (not even Dada was carefree), could hardly achieve.<sup>85</sup>

The exhibition *Pop Art Redefined*, in 1969, curated by Suzi Gablik and John Russell, was an early attempt at understanding the transatlantic synergies which contributed to the movement. Gablik echoes Hamilton in her catalogue essay:

We can more easily discern differences between English and American art in general and Pop art in particular, if we establish that, in America, impersonality as a style is the governing principle, whereas English art is essentially *subjective*.<sup>86</sup>

At least some of the reasons for this can be located in the very different circumstances of young American artists when compared to their British counterparts. Uta Ruhkamp, writing in *This Was Tomorrow: Pop Art in Great Britain*, the most recent publication to assess British Pop describes how:

For [Gerald Laing] the main difference [between the USA and Great Britain] lay in the fact that American artists were not marked by the experience of social, economic and political hardship and were thus characterised by an unattainable lightness.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Battle, in Alexander and Ryan, *International Pop*, 108.

<sup>85</sup> Richard Hamilton cited in Uta Ruhkamp, 'History is Now,' in Ralf Beil and Uta Ruhkamp (eds.), *This Was Tomorrow: Pop Art in Great Britain* (Cologne: Wienand Verlag, 2016), 213.

<sup>86</sup> Suzi Gablik, 'Introduction' in John Russell and Suzi Gablik, *Pop Art Redefined* (London: Thames & Hudson, and New York: Praeger, 1969), 19.

<sup>87</sup> Ruhkamp, in Beil and Ruhkamp (eds.), *This Was Tomorrow: Pop Art in Great Britain*, 213.

Kitaj was represented in *Pop Art Redefined* by the screenprint series *In Our Time*.

Although many of the artists submitted statements of one form or another for the catalogue, Kitaj did not. Hamilton, on the other hand, reproduced the text accompanying *\$he*, as well as a spread of source images for that canvas. Gablik's observations on the distinction between the two varieties of Pop are worth quoting at some length:

There is a distinct conflict between what is read and what is seen. Artists like Paolozzi and Kitaj, for example, are concerned with the manipulation and transformation of images, which function in the end like coded messages. In general, English Pop is a subjective synthesis of imagery derived from streamlined technology, car styling, sex symbols, cybernetics, and movies – a hybrid overlay of techniques and points of view. American Pop tends to be emblematic and frontal, with non-associative images seen in isolation rather than juxtaposed. English Pop uses multi-evocative, metaphoric and multi-focus imagery rather than whole thematic entities. It sprang originally from polemical debates about American advertising and mass-produced urban culture. It has continued, within the conventions of painting, to deal with the *themes* of technology. As such, it *reflects* the changes in the content of culture since the mid-1950s. American Pop, on the other hand, sprang from the direct experience of Pop culture in technology, and has adapted and incorporated actual industrial processes and techniques into its production.<sup>88</sup>

Battle, characterised the distinction in similar, if less polemical, terms to Gablik:

If American Pop can be characterised as a restoration of the pictorial – and one that followed emotive Abstract Expressionism – in which signification was subverted by a cool, detached attitude, then British Pop can be described as an idiosyncratic reflection on the widening cultural spectrum in which representation retained symbolic value.<sup>89</sup>

It is, perhaps, telling that Gablik understands Kitaj as a British artist. John Russell, on the other hand, also writing in *Pop Art Redefined*, acknowledges Kitaj's catalytic role as an outsider:

I doubt there was ever a school of painting in which painters of two countries went to work in a spirit of such harmonious good nature. Dine, Kitaj and Oldenburg have contributed a great deal to our understanding of England; [...]

<sup>88</sup> Suzi Gablik, 'Introduction' in John Russell and Suzi Gablik, *Pop Art Redefined* (London: Thames & Hudson, and New York: Praeger, 1969) 20.

<sup>89</sup> Battle in Alexander and Ryan, *International Pop*, 102.

The 'special relationship' may be outworn in politics but in art it is completely alive.<sup>90</sup>

The symbolic value identified by Battle, it could be argued, had its roots in the historic background of British visual culture. The fact that Kitaj's work is seen in similar terms perhaps suggests his absorption of British influences just at the time he was influencing RCA contemporaries like Hockney.

Whereas, for Americans, their culture was deeply imbued with the example of Europe, for the British, post-Second World War, American culture represented something new – and this could represent both a challenge and an opportunity. Their individual positions were by no means wholeheartedly celebratory. Jan Haworth commenting on her British contemporaries, suggested that: '[M]ost of these people ... weren't so much celebrating [American culture], they didn't approve it, even though they might have been doing paintings of it.'<sup>91</sup> Reflecting on this statement, Ruhkamp has proposed that British Pop represents a process of dealing with cultural change and 'deals with the 'aggressor'.<sup>92</sup>

With this in mind, a consideration of David Hockney's responses to America are instructive. In 1961, Hockney made two trips abroad, one to the USA and one to Italy. The latter was, consciously, 'an artistic tour,' but:

I resisted any influences from the art there, because I thought it's not modern [...] In 1961 the modern world interested me far more, and America specifically.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> John Russell, 'Introduction' in John Russell and Suzi Gablik, *Pop Art Redefined* (London: Thames & Hudson, and New York: Praeger, 1969) 40.

<sup>91</sup> Uta Ruhkamp, in Beil and Ruhkamp (eds.), *This Was Tomorrow: Pop Art in Great Britain*, 213.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 213.

<sup>93</sup> Hockney, in Livingstone, *Hockney by Hockney*, 87.

He had already been to America by that time, having spent the summer in New York.<sup>94</sup> His primary interest on that trip was not art but sex.<sup>95</sup> But, over and above this, New York society was itself energising for Hockney:

I was utterly thrilled by it, all the time I was excited by it. The fact that you could watch television at three in the morning, and go out and the bars would still be open, I thought it was marvellous.<sup>96</sup>

By implication Britain, where the bars certainly would not have been open at three am, is compared unfavourably with America. And with this embracing of America comes a process of reinvention. Following the sale of two suites of etchings: ‘I bought a suit, an American suit, and bleached my hair.’<sup>97</sup>

This, and a further trip to New York, provided Hockney with material for the etching portfolio, *A Rake's Progress* (1961-63). The title's allusion to William Hogarth suite of paintings on the same theme, and the narrative arc of the images, in which the progress (as in Hogarth's version) is towards insanity, suggests a more complex, troubled attitude towards the USA than his recollections suggest. The final plate, *The Bedlam*, shows a row of clones walking towards an ominous red cloud labelled ‘BEDLAM.’ This suggests a no more happy ending than the one Hogarth foresaw for his anti-hero in the 1730s. Bedlam means ‘uproar and confusion’<sup>98</sup> and derives from the Bethlem Royal Hospital, Europe's oldest psychiatric hospital, and the setting for Hogarth's final *Rake's Progress* canvas. This blank, uncertain future contrasts sharply with plate 1, in which the artist (labelled ‘Flying Tyger’) swoops into New York symbolised by two skyscrapers. As Alan Woods has pointed out, European art has historically looked to literature for subject matter: ‘but in England it has been given a

<sup>94</sup> Hockney, in Livingstone, *Hockney by Hockney*, 65.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 65.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 65.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 65.

<sup>98</sup> <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/bedlam> accessed 26.11.2016.

particular national robustness and anti-idealist rootedness ever since Hogarth.<sup>99</sup>

Hockney, whilst ‘resisting’ the ‘not modern’ art of Italy, chose to frame his American experiences in terms of a British artistic tradition.<sup>100</sup> In this respect, he embodies

Battle’s description of the situation in which British Pop artists found themselves:

In wartorn Britain, recent history was inarguably linked to the rise of America as witnessed from across the Atlantic, and the concern to recover aspects of the recent past was commingled with an impassioned interest in popular culture.<sup>101</sup>

It will be seen that there is a discontent at the work here: the thing desired and celebrated is simultaneously perceived as corrupting. Hockney was familiar with the work of Theodore Dreiser, whose novels frequently ‘deal with the experience and subsequent moral corruption of young American men coming from the country into the social and financial world of American cities.’<sup>102</sup> For young American men, one could here substitute young British men. There is, I will argue, a similar discontent at the heart of Kitaj’s project. But, whereas Hockney sought something new in America, and was energised by it, Kitaj, one may say, sought something old in Europe, something that was vanishing even as he arrived here, if it had not already; or, indeed, if it had ever existed. There is, accordingly, a sense of nostalgia, of a lament for something lost, within Kitaj’s work.

In the years following his initial trips to New York, Hockney visited the USA on a number of occasions. Each one resulted in bodies of work on American themes: landscapes of Arizona and Iowa, Californian palm-trees and boulevards, Hollywood swimming pools. Sidney Simon made this point about British Pop’s attitude to

<sup>99</sup> Alan Woods, ‘Paintings with Banging Doors: Art and Allusion in Kitaj and Hockney,’ in *The Cambridge Quarterly*, Vol. 24, No. 4 (1995), 318.

<sup>100</sup> Hockney, in Livingstone, *Hockney by Hockney*, 1976, 87.

<sup>101</sup> Battle in in Alexander and Ryan, *International Pop*, 102.

<sup>102</sup> ‘P07029-P07044 A Rake’s Progress 1961–63’, *The Tate Gallery Report 1970–1972* (London: Tate Gallery, 1972), <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/hockney-8a-bedlam-p07044/text-catalogue-entry> accessed 26.11.2016.

American culture, writing in particular of Hockney's work: 'he mirrors the familiar in New York, Iowa or California in a manner which is delightfully obvious, but at the same time obviously foreign and, hence, fascinating.'<sup>103</sup> It is as if his enthusiasm for the place could only find full expression through his depicting it, naturally enough for an artist. As he explained:

The one thing that had happened in Los Angeles was that I had begun to paint real things I had seen [...] In Los Angeles I actually began to paint the city around me, as I'd never – still haven't – done in London.<sup>104</sup>

And by painting it, one may say, he attempts to possess this real, modern (contemporary) city around him. Kitaj does not do anything quite like this with Europe. His tendency to focus instead on historical moments like the Spanish Civil War could appear a retreat from the contemporary.

As a United States citizen who had lived and studied in New York, Kitaj had first-hand experience of contemporary American art, unlike his British fellow students. Yet he had received most of his formal art education in Europe, which means that the artistic debates he was most immediately involved in were European, and, specifically, British. He introduces specific themes from recent European history into his work around 1960, the point at which he begins to forge a distinctive artistic voice during his time at the Royal College of Art. As Simon Faulkner observes:

Kitaj's nostalgia for the Spanish Civil War and its libertarian moment stood in contrast to the concerns with contemporary culture presented by Denny and Smith in the 1950s, and other young painters at the Royal College in the 1960s. It was this nostalgic optic, unique to Kitaj at the Royal College, which was central to his early formation as an artist.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Sidney Simon, 'From England's Green and Pleasant Bowers', *Art News* 64, no 2 (April 1965), 29-31 and 64-65.

<sup>104</sup> Hockney, in Livingstone, *Hockney by Hockney*, 104.

<sup>105</sup> Simon Faulkner, 'The History Behind the Surface: RB Kitaj and the Spanish Civil War,' in James Aulich and John Lynch, *Critical Kitaj: Essays on the work of RB Kitaj* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 118.



Although a ‘nostalgic optic’ is arguably crucial to his artistic development, I am not sure that it was unique to Kitaj at the Royal College, as we shall see.

Most commentators refer to Kitaj’s influence on his fellow students at the Royal College.<sup>106</sup> David Hockney has, perhaps, done most to establish this narrative with his acknowledgement that Kitaj’s attitude and advice helped him to clarify his own attitude towards painting:

The one student I kept talking to a lot was Ron Kitaj. [...] I’d talk to him about my interests; I was a keen vegetarian then, and interested in politics a bit, and he’d say to me Why don’t you paint those subjects? And I thought, it’s quite right; that’s what I’m complaining about, I’m not doing anything that’s from me. So that’s the way I broke it. I began to paint those subjects.<sup>107</sup>

Less clear, because less explored, is the extent of British artists’ influence on Kitaj. Prompted by a notebook entry of Pauline Boty’s, in which the painter refers to a ‘nostalgia for now,’ Battle has attempted to distinguish British Pop from its American counterpart by considering the importance of nostalgia as a theme and, perhaps more importantly, a motivator for young British artists around 1960.<sup>108</sup> To frame her argument she draws on the work of social anthropologist Kathleen Stewart, whose essay *Nostalgia: A Polemic* she uses to define the meaning of the term:

[Nostalgia] is a cultural proactive, not a given content; its forms, meanings and effects shift with context – it depends on where the speaker stands in the landscape of the present.<sup>109</sup>

For the younger generation of British artists emerging from the 1950s, the social, cultural and political landscape was one of profound shifts. If America was in the ascendant, Britain’s position was far more tentative, as Dean Acheson appositely remarked:

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<sup>106</sup> See for instance: Marco Livingstone, *Kitaj* (Oxford: Phaidon, 1984, 4<sup>th</sup> edition 2010), 21.

<sup>107</sup> Hockney in Stangos, *Hockney by Hockney*, 41.

<sup>108</sup> See Sue Tate, *Pauline Boty: Pop Artist and Woman* (Wolverhampton: Wolverhampton Art Gallery, 2013), 7.

<sup>109</sup> Kathleen Stewart, ‘Nostalgia: A Polemic,’ in *Cultural Anthropology* vol. 3, no. 3 (1988) 227.

Great Britain has lost an empire and has not yet found a role.<sup>110</sup>

Some areas of London bore the scars of the Blitz until well into the 1960s. At the same time Britain's deferential, class-based society was being challenged via film, radio, television and a rapidly evolving music scene, much of which originated in the USA. Against this backdrop, the younger generation of artists sought to establish a language that grappled with these conflicting influences, a language that referenced and questioned the American culture then pervading Europe, whilst delving into the byways of British identity. Derek Boshier's *England's Glory* is a good example of this: it juxtaposes and blends the red, white and blue of the US and British flags, and makes ironic reference to the Britain's reduced place on the world's stage via a box of matches. It will be seen that this must have presented a source of tension for Kitaj. The cultural tide was turning. Whereas his predecessors had sought culture in European, it was American culture, of which he was himself an example, that was now the stronger influence. Something of this may be inferred from his tetchy remarks to Maurice Tuchman:

I still balk at the word Pop ... Real Pop (not art) bores the hell out of me...<sup>111</sup>

Stewart seems to view nostalgia as a recuperative, a means through which to ameliorate trauma and loss. She describes it as being:

[...] a pained, watchful desire to frame the cultural present in relation to an 'other' world – to make of the present a cultural object that can be seen, appropriated, refused, disrupted or 'made something of.'<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Dean Acheson, 'Our Atlantic alliance', I63-4, quoted in Douglas Brinkley, 'Dean Acheson and the "Special Relationship": The West Point Speech of December 1962,' *The Historical Journal*, vol. 33, no. 3 (Sep., 1990), 601.

<sup>111</sup> RB Kitaj quoted in Maurice Tuchman, *RB Kitaj* ( Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, , 1965), unpaginated.

<sup>112</sup> Stewart, *Cultural Anthropology*, 228.

It is a process of piling things up around the self until there is no border between inside and outside, ...<sup>113</sup>

The second of these quotes has obvious echoes of TS Eliot's line in *The Waste Land*: 'these fragments I have shored against my ruin.' She goes on to consider how the fragment – itself a key element in Pop aesthetics – can be used to convey history and 'collective reality.'

Postmodern modes of representation – story, fragmentation, montage, juxtaposition – are necessary, not because they are aesthetically, stylistically 'right' for a moment frozen in history but because built into their surfaces are the layers of history as they have been frozen there and the ruins of contemporary social relations as they lay in waste. A sense of history and collective reality may need to be built up through a montage of carefully juxtaposed nonlinear images if we are to suggest anything of its totality.<sup>114</sup>

If there was a climate of nostalgia around younger British artists in the late-1950s and early-1960s, then this may have had an effect on Kitaj, encouraging a tendency already apparent in his desire to come to Europe. For apparent throughout his work is a concern with and nostalgia for the culture of a specifically Modernist Europe, as Nochlin identifies in her discussion of *Autumn of Central Paris (After Walter Benjamin)*:

The whole work is redolent of Manet's *Concert at the Tuileries*, which was, after all, an homage to the creative Paris of the Second Empire, but it projects a vision of the intellectual life of the city now abjected, ominous, torn apart.<sup>115</sup>

Kitaj's use of fragmentation, emphatically apparent in the 1960s, itself creates an atmosphere of tension, of disjuncture and alienation, of what Richard Wollheim termed 'intimations of the uncanny.'<sup>116</sup>

<sup>113</sup> Stewart, *Cultural Anthropology*, 235.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 239.

<sup>115</sup> Linda Nochlin, 'Art and the Conditions of Exile: Men/Women, Emigration/Expatriation,' in *Poetics Today* vol. 17, no.3, *Creativity and Exile: European/American Perspectives* (Autumn 1996), 323.

<sup>116</sup> Richard Wollheim, 'Kitaj: Recollections and Reflections,' in Richard Morphet, *RB Kitaj: A Retrospective* (London: Tate Gallery, 1994), 38.

### Kitaj in Spain

The history of Spain, particularly during the 1930s, is one of the earliest manifestations of Kitaj's romance of Europe to appear overtly in his work. It is bound up with his personal history or, more properly, that of his parents and in his reading. For Kitaj, the ambitions and failures of the European Left and, by extension, of European culture itself can be seen in microcosm in the Spanish Civil War, and this theme he explored across a number of canvases from the early 1960s to the mid-1970s.

His direct experience of Spain followed his studies in Vienna. After getting married in New York, Kitaj and Elsi returned to Austria before travelling on through Europe and into North Africa.<sup>117</sup> Finally the young couple arrived in southern Spain, where they stayed over winter in the Catalan port of Sant Felú de Guixols. In an interview with the novelist Julián Ríos, he evokes his youthful self, newly arrived in Catalonia, in a revealing vignette:

When I first lived in Sant Feliu in the winter and spring of 1952-3 I pretended I was Hemingway. ... I would go out on fishing boats. I would fantasize myself fighting at the Jarama, spilling fascist blood and I would sport a sharp knife on my belt.<sup>118</sup>

One of his most significant and long-lasting friendships was with Josep Vicente Roma (1922-2011), who was to become the first Socialist Mayor of Sant Felú. Roma, manager of a local cork factory, was the subject of a number of drawings and a family meal at his house is celebrated in the 1973-74 canvas *To Live in Peace (The Singers)*. Kitaj visited the town annually and, in the early 1970s, even went so far as to buy a

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<sup>117</sup> Morphet, *RB Kitaj: A Retrospective*, 58

<sup>118</sup> Ríos, *Kitaj: Pictures and Conversations*, 168.

house there. At the same time he also began to study Catalan. By that point, he was no longer picturing himself as Hemingway but as a ‘painter Unamuno in my tall, dusty, dark house with the lovely courtyard’.<sup>119</sup> It should be remembered that, from the point he first arrived in Spain to the mid-1970s, the country was under the control of an oppressive, dictatorial Fascist regime, under the leadership of Francisco Franco. For Spaniards, aftershocks from the Spanish Civil War continued to be powerfully felt.

One of the first paintings Kitaj made to deal with Spanish themes, although in a distinctly covert manner, was *Specimen Musings of a Democrat*, (fig. 5) an oil and collage of 1961. Formally the image is composed of a geometric grid, a device already explored in two canvases of the late 1950s, *Tarot Variations* and *Erasmus Variations* (fig. 6). In these earlier paintings, the grids are large and somewhat loosely distributed across the canvas and the paint is applied in a freely brushed manner suggestive of Francis Bacon and Willem de Kooning. In *Specimen Musings of a Democrat*, on the other hand, the grid structure is rigorously applied: a series of uniformly sized rectangles, about the dimensions of index cards, is arranged in tight formation within a larger rectangle drawn in paint. Many of the rectangles contain collage: sometimes this takes the form of handwritten notes, sometimes a drawing, sometimes a fly-leaf from a book.

About this work Kitaj wrote: ‘My real-life romance with Catalonia inspired two or three paintings based on the visionary notations of Ramon Lull, or at least the crypto-surrealist *look* of them’.<sup>120</sup> More specifically, he wrote:

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<sup>119</sup> Ríos, *Kitaj: Pictures and Conversations*, 168.

<sup>120</sup> Kitaj cited in Morphet, *RB Kitaj: A Retrospective*, 48.

As a student of Surrealism and Dada, I was drawn both to the outlandish imagery of such Warburg nonsense-visions as Lull's diagrammatic 'Art' and his absurdist claims to demonstrate infallible truth in all spheres through his art. This collage painting was suggested by the type of crazy chart by Lull which had been treated with contempt by previous scholars...<sup>121</sup>

Kitaj had come across Lull's art whilst browsing through the pages of the *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*. An essay by Frances A Yates entitled 'The Art of Ramon Lull: an approach to it through Lull's theory of the elements'<sup>122</sup> analyses the Spaniard's work at length and with the aid of copious illustrations. Of these, what seems to have been most suggestive to Kitaj was a stepped grid diagram, similar to a modern day mileage chart. Yates' essay was published in 1954 and Kitaj only began his perusal of the *Warburg Journals* from about 1958, the time he was in Oxford. 1958 was also the year he begins to use grids in his paintings, such as the previously mentioned *Tarot Variations* and *Erasmus Variations*.

The title of the painting suggests the loose associating of ideas: these are, perhaps, musings in the sense that Joycean interior monologue is musing (one is also reminded of TS Eliot's description of *The Waste Land* as 'rhythmical grumbling'). Marco Livingstone makes the following observation about the fragmentation of Kitaj's early compositions.

The deliberate scattering of attention across the surface of ... [the] paintings provides an inducement for the mind to wander, focusing attention randomly on specific images as an equivalent to the mind's habit of jumping suddenly from vague reveries to a specific idea.<sup>123</sup>

This may be true to some extent but Kitaj's images are never quite random. In fact, the overriding impression of a canvas such as *Specimen Musings of a Democrat* is one

<sup>121</sup> Morphet, *RB Kitaj: A Retrospective*, 215

<sup>122</sup> Frances A. Yates, 'The Art of Ramon Lull: An Approach to it Through Lull's Theory of the Elements' *The Journal of the Warburg Institute* vol.17, no.1/2 (1954): 115-173.

<sup>123</sup> Livingstone, *RB Kitaj*, 14-15.

of focus. The collaged elements on the painting, however diverse they may be, point to specific concerns. Two of the cards, for instance, refer to 'King Alfonso's bomb'. Shortly after his marriage in 1906, anarchists made an unsuccessful attempt to assassinate King Alfonso XIII of Spain (1886-1941) by blowing him up. Equally, given Kitaj's immersion in the lore of the Spanish civil war and his friendship with Josep Vicente, this could relate to the activities of the Spanish anarchist group *Los Solidarios* (Solidarity). Amongst the founding members of this group was Buenaventura Durutti (1896-1936) a key figure in the Leftist pantheon of Kitaj's early output and one who would appear in paintings and exhibition catalogues at the beginning of the 1960s. Quite probably both readings could apply simultaneously for Kitaj constantly compacts imagery in this way, producing an effect analogous to punning and wordplay, so that the meaning is never quite fixed.

A further two of the index cards feature loose outline drawings of the head of a woman, one of which is inscribed 'The Red Virgin'. This is a clear reference to Louise Michel (1830-1905), memorialised by the French Left as the 'Red Virgin' of the 1871 Paris Commune. Even without the soubriquet, Kitaj's profile drawings clearly resemble existing photographs of Michel. A leading proponent of Anarchism, Michel was neither a theorist nor an organiser; her political beliefs were essentially Romantic.<sup>124</sup> Following the fall of the Commune, she was arrested, tried and sentenced to exile, spending a total of six years in a penal colony in New Caledonia and only came back to France following the general amnesty granted to the Communards in 1880. Huge crowds greeted her return and she retained great public support throughout her life.

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<sup>124</sup> Bullitt Lowry and Elizabeth Ellington Gunter (eds), *The Red Virgin: Memoirs of Louise Michel* (Alabama: The University of Alabama Press, 1981), x.

On the left of the canvas are images and references to the English proto-socialist, Dan Chatterton (1820-1895). Chatterton had no historical link with Spain but, in the summer of 1962, in the house at Sant Feliu de Guixols, Kitaj began a painting to be called *Interior/Dan Chatterton's Town House*. He later suggested that, for him, this created a link between Chatterton and Catalonia based on their commitments to anarchism.<sup>125</sup> As *Specimen Musings of a Democrat* was made in 1961, it would seem that the connection was already in Kitaj's mind. Taken together, then, the references in the painting to Chatterton, Weil and King Alfonso suggest that the overarching theme takes the form of a meditation on the history of the European revolutionary Left.

*Specimen Musings of a Democrat* was not the only reference Kitaj made in the early 1960s to the history of European anarchism. The figure of Durruti, for instance, in the form of a large format photograph, had greeted visitors to Kitaj's first solo exhibition at Marlborough Fine Art in 1963.<sup>126</sup> Durruti appears again on the right-hand side of a painting dated to 1962, *Junta* (fig. 7). This canvas consists of a series of juxtaposed portraits that were, the artist wrote in the preface written to accompany it, 'meant to illustrate, to invent the (imaginary) members of a benign revolutionary government.'<sup>127</sup> Furthermore, he went on to explain that:

Junta was painted in Catalonia and grew out of my friendship with Josep Vicente which began in 1953. He used to talk fondly of the grizzled old anarchists he would introduce me to and of how well they fought in what he still calls 'our war' and of their only very brief success, organizing some coastal villages before oblivion came down on them and Europe.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> Faulkner in *Critical Kitaj*, 119.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, 116.

<sup>127</sup> Livingstone, *Kitaj*, 234.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 234.



An image of Durrutti also graced the same page in the exhibition catalogue, as the notes to another of his Spanish canvases, *Kennst du das Land?* painted the same year as *Junta* 1962.<sup>129</sup> Durruti's significance within the context of the Spanish civil war is instructive for our understanding of Kitaj's interest in the subject. As an early anarchist, Durruti had become well known in Spain with 'a reputation as a revolutionary Robin Hood.'<sup>130</sup> His role in the defence of Aragon in July 1936 and, later that year, Madrid, during which he was fatally injured, secured his fame. 500,000 people attended his funeral in Barcelona and he subsequently took on almost mythic status within Republican Spain. A cinema in Barcelona was named after him and, like many revolutionary figures, Mao Zedong and Che Guevara amongst them, his face began to appear on posters, with the effect that, as Faulkner suggests, he became a somewhat romanticised Republican icon.<sup>131</sup>

Nestling amidst a bouquet of flowers alongside Durrutti in *Junta* is a spiked sphere, resembling a mine (fig. 8). It seems likely that this structure represents an Orsini bomb (fig. 9), an explosive device developed by Italian Anarchist Felice Orsini (1819-1858) with the assistance of an English gunsmith. A series of horns or spikes filled with fulminate of mercury caused the bomb to explode on impact, at least in theory. On 7 November 1893, Anarchist Santiago Salvador threw two such bombs at the crowd outside Barcelona's Gran Teatre del Liceu. One bomb exploded, killing twenty-two people and injuring thirty-five. The other failed to explode, and is now in the possession of Barcelona's City History Museum.<sup>132</sup> As Kitaj had a sustained connection with Catalonia, of which Barcelona is the capital, he may well have been

<sup>129</sup> Faulkner in *Critical Kitaj*, 119.

<sup>130</sup> Antony Beevor, *The Battle for Spain: the Spanish Civil War 1936-39* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2006; paperback Phoenix, 2006) 203.

<sup>131</sup> Faulkner in *Critical Kitaj*, 120.

<sup>132</sup> [http://www.nieuwsuitamsterdam.nl/English/2007/07/orsini\\_barcelona.htm](http://www.nieuwsuitamsterdam.nl/English/2007/07/orsini_barcelona.htm) accessed 5.1.2016.

aware of this object. Furthermore, a carving on Antoni Gaudi's *Sagrada Familia* cathedral, in Barcelona, depicts a demon handing an Orsini bomb to a worker. As in *Specimen Musings of a Democrat*, Kitaj is again drawing together disparate but related elements around the theme of the struggle of the European Left and giving them a distinctly Spanish twist.

Perhaps Kitaj's best known Spanish civil war painting is *Kennst du das Land?* of 1962, (fig. 10) which is dedicated to Josep Vicente Roma.<sup>133</sup> The canvas is divided into two registers. In the lower, larger register, groups of soldiers huddle around machine guns aimed out of the canvas, at the spectator, behind them are two cars, two outsize lemons, and a cartouche within which is a leg, possibly belonging to another soldier. All of these images are set within a flurry of white paint, dabbled and dragged with conspicuous brushmarks. The upper, narrower register, in contrast, features three collaged elements: a line transcription of a Goya drawing, showing a prostitute adjusting her stocking, and two roughly torn pieces of paper, bearing individual broad, gestural brushstrokes. Simon Faulkner sees the Goya transcription as appropriate to Kitaj's painting because: 'it refers back to a prior period of civil strife in Spain and to the practice of an artist associated with Spanish liberalism.'<sup>134</sup> But consider Kitaj's decision to draw Goya's original: this is the act of the dutiful apprentice copying by hand in the studio of the master. Allusions to the old masters occur frequently in Kitaj's oeuvre and, overwhelmingly, they are drawn. In this he differs markedly from Rauschenberg, who simply appropriated such imagery photographically. Alongside this, one might consider the inclusion of a group of superb life drawings, made while Kitaj was studying at Oxford, in his 1963 exhibition *Pictures with Commentary, Pictures Without Commentary*. These drawings reappear

<sup>133</sup> Morphet, *RB Kitaj: A Retrospective*, 78.

<sup>134</sup> Faulkner, in *Critical Kitaj*, 116.

in his Smithsonian retrospective of 1980 and his Tate retrospective of 1994. It is almost as if the display of these early drawings is being used as permission for the subsequent, more formally experimental works. They function, one might say, as a display of credentials.

A further Spanish connection can be proposed for this figure. Its position at the top of the painting, its general pose and the 'frame' created by the paper on which it is drawn, recall the figure silhouetted in the door in Diego Velázquez's monumental *Las Meninas*. However, Velázquez's figure seems about to enter the room, whereas Kitaj's figure has her back turned to the events depicted below her. The implications of this are ambiguous. It could be read as repudiation or, given the casual readjustment of the stocking, indifference.

The 'lemons' are even more ambiguous features. In both the preface and in conversation with Julián Ríos, Kitaj shifts their meaning, referring to them as 'granadas/pomegranates' and as 'dumb lemons'.<sup>135</sup> The conversation with Ríos clearly took place before Kitaj drafted his preface, for he discusses 'appropriating' some of Ríos's readings 'when I come to write it.'<sup>136</sup> And, indeed, it is apparent on comparison of the two texts that it was Ríos who first described the lemons as 'granadas (grenades/pomegranates),' thus drawing the Spanish language, the Spanish region of Granada, an explosive device and fruit into the reading of these yellow shapes.<sup>137</sup> That he was prepared subsequently to give approval to Ríos's wordplay by including it in his own preface, suggests that, even as late as the 1990s, the more collaborative Kitaj, to be found chiefly in the 1960s, was still quietly at work.

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<sup>135</sup> Morphet, *RB Kitaj: A Retrospective*, 78.

<sup>136</sup> Ríos, *Kitaj: Pictures and Conversations*, 160.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, 160.

Kitaj retrospectively proposed some of the painting's meaning in the preface written for the Tate retrospective, stating:

What I loved even more than Catalonia was my friendship with Josep, just about the purest heart I've ever known, and this painting, begun in his house high over the sea is really about what he called 'our war' which tore his Spain apart and burned its way into the souls of so many people I've known.<sup>138</sup>

The catalogue notes Kitaj provided for the painting in his 1963 exhibition catalogue appeared alongside a photograph of Durruti. They include not only the quote from Goethe's 1795-96 novel *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre*, from which the painting's title is derived, but also a simple litany of significant civil war battles. This runs as follows:

**In Memorium**

Jarama River

Brunete

Quinto

Belchite

Teruel

The Aragon Retreats.<sup>139</sup>

These battles represent the decline in the fortunes of the Republican cause during the course of the civil war. Most significantly, they also record the involvement of the International Brigades and American battalions, with Leftist forces.<sup>140</sup> The series of battles referred to as the Aragon Retreats were, in particular, the point at which the Republic was forced onto the defensive.

In a discussion of *Kennst du das Land?* Simon Faulkner compellingly argues the significance of the Spanish civil war in Kitaj's work and life. With regards to the central image of the painting, the group of soldiers gathered around machine guns,

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<sup>138</sup> Morphet, *RB Kitaj: A Retrospective*, 78.

<sup>139</sup> RB Kitaj, *Pictures with Commentary, Pictures without Commentary*, (London: Marlborough Fine Art, 1964), unpaginated.

<sup>140</sup> Faulkner in *Critical Kitaj*, 123.

Faulkner has revealed that the two main sources of this imagery were photographs which appeared in HG Cardozo's *The March of a Nation: My year of Spain's Civil War*, which was published in 1937 by the 'Right' Book Club.<sup>141</sup> One included the cars, the other, showing the machine gunners, was entitled *Nationalists advancing on a suburb of Madrid* (fig. 11). The fact that Kitaj's source was an apologia for the Nationalist cause raises interesting questions. Faulkner suggests that he may have forgotten what the photograph was really about, which is possible, but unlikely. It is conceivable that he could have stumbled across one of these images divorced from its original context, perhaps in a magazine. But, if he had access to both illustrations, then it is not unreasonable to assume he had the book itself. Indeed, a reproduction of its cover appears prominently in the screenprint *What is a Comparison*, published in 1964, ie two years after he painted *Kennst du das Land?* Faulkner's sees the use of Nationalist imagery as an evocation of the Republic through negative means. He quotes Kitaj's remark about the 'repressive surface of Franco's regime' to suggest that the painting is about what is not visible, what is buried beneath the surface, under the snow, or the whitewashing of the all over Modernist brushwork.<sup>142</sup> There is also the likelihood, since Kitaj specifically refers, in the 1963 Marlborough catalogue, to the edition of *Homage to Catalonia* published the year *Kennst du das Land?* was painted, that he was familiar with Orwell's remark that all the combatants looked the same in their threadbare uniforms.<sup>143</sup> Certainly, there is nothing in the painting to identify the figures as belonging to one side or the other. In any case, if Kitaj did intend them to represent Nationalism, these figures are generic fighters, footsloggers with machine guns, lost in a blizzard of white, going nowhere. Their cars do not even have wheels.

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<sup>141</sup> Faulkner in *Critical Kitaj*, 125.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, 135.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, 126.

Text was a significant and active aspect of Kitaj's work throughout his career. This is clear from his habit of appending notes to his paintings and, later, of writing prefaces, such as the one mentioned above. Faulkner has observed that:

... Kitaj's paintings during the early 1960s referred to concerns with political history, art history and literature. Thus Kitaj's early practice stood in critical relationship to the anti-literariness of the forms of abstract art supported by art critics such as Clement Greenberg in the United States and Lawrence Alloway in England.<sup>144</sup>

He was not alone in this, for Richard Hamilton was also critically engaged in the meta- or para-textual elements of the work of art in the 1960s. I will discuss this in greater detail in the following chapter but, with this in mind, it is worth spending a little time considering the title of this canvas. The phrase *Kennst du das Land?* comes from Goethe's 1795 novel *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*. It is direct and informal (*kennst du* not *kennen sie*), thus placing the viewer on familiar, fraternal, terms with the artist (if he can be proposed as the 'speaker,' in this case). In the novel, these are the first words of a song sung to Wilhelm by the young girl, Mignon:

Kennst du das Land, wo die Zitronen blühn,  
Im dunklen Laub die Gold-Orangen glühn,  
Ein sanfter Wind vom blauen Himmel weht,  
Die Myrte still und hoch der Lorbeer steht,  
Kennst du es wohl?  
Dahin! Dahin  
Möcht ich mit dir, o mein Geliebter ziehn.<sup>145</sup>

Having repeated the song, so Wilhelm could write it down, she puts the question to him directly:

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<sup>144</sup> Faulkner in *Critical Kitaj*, 112.

<sup>145</sup> Know you the land where the lemon blossoms blow, / And through dark leaves the golden oranges glow, / A gentle breeze wafts from an azure sky, / The myrtle's still, the laurel tree grows high – / You know it, yes? Oh there, oh there / With you, O my beloved, would I fare. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (trans. EA Blackall), *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 83.

When she had finished the song a second time she paused, looked straight at Wilhelm, and asked: 'Do you know the land?' 'It must be Italy', Wilhelm replied.<sup>146</sup>

It must be Italy, with all of its cultural echoes, the same echoes which lured Benjamin West to Europe, and which lured Goethe himself. Mignon's song imagines an idyllic landscape into which she would go with her beloved. But Kitaj directs the words to Spain. We are asked if we know that particular land, in which the struggle between Socialism and Fascism resulted in the failure of the Left. Remembering Stewart's definition of nostalgia:

Historical and social redemption would be a work of allegory and *bricolage* – a piecing together of encompassing stories without recourse to the ideological notions of interiority and transcendence.<sup>147</sup>

With this in mind, one potential reading might perhaps propose that the idyll implied in Kitaj's use of Goethe's words is an irrecoverably lost *potential* Socialism, the historic moment when it *might* have been achieved. This reading is reinforced if we consider the movement of Goethe's lines from Italian idyll to more traumatic scenes:

Was hat man dir, du armes kind, getan?  
Kennst du es wohl?

And further on:

Kennst du den Berg und seinen Wolkensteg  
Das Maultier sucht im Nebel seinen Weg,  
In Höhlen wohnt der Drachen alte Brut<sup>148</sup>

<sup>146</sup> Goethe, *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*, 84.

<sup>147</sup> Stewart, *Cultural Anthropology*, 239.

<sup>148</sup> You poor, poor child, what have they done to you? / You know it, yes? [...] Know you the mountain and its cloudy trails? / The mule picks out its path through misty veils / The dragon's brood haunt caverns here. Goethe, *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*, , 83.

If we accept this reading, then some of Faulkner's reservations over the prominent inclusion of Nationalist forces in the painting may be addressed. As they point their machine-guns at the onlooker, they should presumably in some sense be regarded as threatening. Should they, then, be read as 'the dragon's brood'? And what of 'the mountain and its cloudy trails'? Kitaj hints that the painting may depict the battle of Teruel in his preface, writing of: 'my snowy battle (of Teruel?).'<sup>149</sup> This may be too literal a reading. I do not wish to suggest that *Kennst du das Land?* simply illustrates Goethe's poem. Rather, that painting and text were intricately linked for Kitaj and that his titles were not arbitrary. On the contrary, they were part of the complex matrix of the work.

Twenty years separate *Kennst du das Land?* from *To Live in Peace (The Singers)* (fig. 12). Painted in 1973-4, this canvas avoids Modernist fragmentation to give, instead, a wide-angle cinema-screen vision of a group of people seated at a table. It is one of the most charming and untroubling images in Kitaj's oeuvre. On the left, a doorway opens onto a terrace and, beyond, dunes roll down to a brilliant blue sea. A solid yellow slab of sunlight streams in, contrasting sharply with the otherwise darkened interior. At the table coffee has been served and red wine, although a bottle of champagne remains unopened. The people sit back and relax whilst two of them, a man and a young woman provide entertainment by singing. Although the perspective is compressed, it is logical and unified. The cropping of the singing man's head and the stray pieces of furniture poking up along the lower edge give the image the informal air of a snapshot, whilst evoking the work of Degas and Lautrec, who both employed similar effects. Its mood of repletion and ease recalls the work of one other

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<sup>149</sup> Morphet, *RB Kitaj*, 1994, 78.



late-19th century painter, Auguste Renoir, as Joe Shannon has observed.<sup>150</sup> In fact, the spatial conceit Kitaj employs here of an enclosed world of sophistication and conviviality contrasted with sun drenched nature outside, is remarkably similar to Renoir's *Luncheon of the Boating Party* of 1880-81, now in the Phillips Collection, Washington DC.

In his preface to this painting, Kitaj wrote

Watching the Catalans, this family of friends, emerge from under fascism to live in peace during the years I had a house there, played strange tricks on me because I would eat at the table you see in the painting year after year and envy their, what shall I call it? – their elective affinity for what they deemed to be their own... and I took heart and I raised myself up, said a grateful goodbye to Catalonia and went in search of my own elective affinities.<sup>151</sup>

Elective affinities summon the spirit of Goethe, placing this canvas in direct relation to *Kennst du das Land?* This, together with Kitaj's text, imparts a valedictory mood to the painting, which actually fits it very well. It was painted at a time when the regime of Generalissimo Francisco Franco (1892-1975) was visibly crumbling. A bright new day of Democratic Socialism was dawning, perhaps, just outside the window. In fact, Franco died the year following the completion of this canvas.

Ironically, Kitaj visited Sant Felú less and less after Franco's death, in part at least because what had once been a quiet fishing town had become a holiday resort. 'The sands of time blew Franco away and Spain began to change,' Kitaj wrote.

In the dark, backstreet shops where wrinkled old ladies doled out cooked garbanzo beans, Discos and boutiques would replace them. Distinguished 19<sup>th</sup> century mansions on the Paseo del Mar were torn down for ugly, cheap, bland tourist hotels.<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>150</sup> Joe Shannon, 'The allegorist: Kitaj and the Viewer' in *RB Kitaj: Paintings, Drawings, Pastels*, edited by Joe Shannon (London: Thames & Hudson, 1983), 28.

<sup>151</sup> Kitaj cited in Morphet, *RB Kitaj: A Retrospective*, 216. The ellipsis is Kitaj's own.

<sup>152</sup> RB Kitaj, RB, 'Spain on My Mind' in *Kitaj: Retrato de un hispanista*, edited by Marco Livingstone (Bilbao: Museo de Bellas Artes de Bilbao, 2004), 125.

A similar despoiling was described to Julián Ríos

The fantasy house became an enchanted island in a tourist town, a museum-piece stuck among fancy shops, ugly modern hotels, nightclubs and beach trade. The Med-Holiday aura defeated my spirit.<sup>153</sup>

A pre-lapsarian idyll is swept away by the chilly, grit-filled wind of real, here-and-now culture. In other words, there was no longer room for Hemingwayesque (or, for that matter, Unamunesque) fantasies. The Europe of richly sophisticated cultural heritage, but also of a certain untouched simplicity, was being replaced by crass consumerist society. Equally significant in his slow withdrawal from Spain was the more deeply personal fact that his growing involvement with Judaism was taking over his imagination. ‘Something was smouldering in my soul,’ as he put it in 2004.

The Jewish Question began to fascinate me more and more. It was to become the central drama of my life. The way Josep [Vicente] addressed his Catalan dream inspired and encouraged my own growing excitement in the Romance of Jewish Studies.<sup>154</sup>

The Spanish civil war represents one pressure point in the European crisis of the 20th century. The ideological fault line, which Kitaj saw developing in the divided Vienna, was another. Furthermore, as his letter to Jeanne Brooks shows, in Austria he had clearly sensed hostility towards Americans, including himself, even if this was only expressed through overcharging.

By the time Kitaj began to appropriate images of Durruti the Spanish Republican cause had become history. Simon Faulkner suggests that, for Kitaj, Durruti simply stands as a Left icon or symbol of the Republican cause.<sup>155</sup> But this seems to make the appropriation of Durruti into another Pop moment. If it does symbolise the Left, it

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<sup>153</sup> Ríos, *Kitaj: Pictures and Conversations*, 168.

<sup>154</sup> Kitaj cited in Livingstone, *Kitaj: Retrato de un hispanista*, 125.

<sup>155</sup> Faulkner, *Critical Kitaj*, 121.

also refers to stories, which Kitaj was told as a boy by his parents and their friends. Indeed, according to Kitaj, two of his mother's boyfriends were killed in the Spanish civil war.<sup>156</sup> Moreover and, it seems to me, crucially, the referencing of figures like Durrutti and causes such as that of Spanish Republicanism, recalls a lost moment, a potential moment. Franco's Spain was also the Spain of increasing commercialisation, in which fishing villages were transformed into holiday resorts. Europe, in other words, was changing and through his work Kitaj sought, one might say, a recuperative art, one which made sense of this new world through reference to the lost culture he associated with 'Hemingway, Joyce, etc' and which he sought on leaving the USA.<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>156</sup> Faulkner, *Critical Kitaj*, 123.

<sup>157</sup> Morphet, *RB Kitaj*, 1994

## Chapter 2

### LUXEMBURG – WARBURG

It is a commonplace of the literature on Kitaj to mention his use of the *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* as a source for his work. At best, this usually means identifying it as the source of specific imagery. Rarely does it prompt an explication of potential meaning. Having looked at Kitaj's early experience of physical Europe, I would like to discuss next to his engagement with some of the less familiar byways of European (and, indeed, American) culture as it is to be found within the *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*. I would also like to consider how Aby Warburg's own ideas can prompt fruitful readings of Kitaj's work. In order to do so, I will be discussing in particular two early paintings: *The Murder of Rosa Luxemburg* (fig. 13) and *The Red Banquet* (fig. 14) both made in 1960. As I aim to show, both of these canvases draw their raw imagery direct from the pages of the *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*. *The Murder of Rosa Luxemburg* will be the main focus of enquiry but I include *The Red Banquet* because its imagery refers directly to a key concept in Warburg's thinking – the irrational roots of civilised culture – one which I feel connects with Kitaj's programme generally, and with the Luxemburg canvas in particular.

In addition to their Warburgian content, both paintings have in common sheets of Kitaj's handwritten notes glued to their surfaces. I will take this opportunity to analyse the *Murder of Rosa Luxemburg* text in some detail because it can usefully be compared with texts on the same subject that Kitaj wrote many years later. The incorporation of notes within the fabric of the image was a hallmark of the artist's paintings of the early-1960s and he openly acknowledged TS Eliot's use of annotation

as the prompt for his own use of such addenda. In the case of *The Murder of Rosa Luxemburg*, the notes provide a description of Luxemburg's murder, taken from Paul Frölich's *Rosa Luxemburg*, plus a reference to an article to be found in the *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*. Kitaj later explained that he was prompted to do this by TS Eliot's *The Waste Land*, a poem which is, famously, supplied with several pages of notes. In the preface to the 1958 painting *Tarot Variations* (ironically, a canvas not annotated) he explained the idea behind both the structure of his images and his use of textual references.

Eliot inspired me, first in a tentative way in this painting and then more plainly and awkwardly in a few others, to place images abreast (and later annotated), as if they were poetic lines on a page... When I got to the Royal College of Art a year or two later, I bought the first appearance of that mighty poem in Eliot's own *Criterion* and proceeded to blandly incorporate notes into paintings for the first time...<sup>158</sup>

There is a certain irony in his reference to the first publication of *The Waste Land* in *Criterion* for, on that occasion, it did not actually have the notes.<sup>159</sup> They were added later, as Eliot initially believed the poem too short as it stood to release in book form, so added extra material to make it physically more substantial.<sup>160</sup> Nevertheless, Eliot's use of annotation clearly prompted Kitaj to adopt a similar tactic.

Although he stopped integrating text physically into his paintings fairly early on, Kitaj maintained the practice of writing commentaries to his work throughout his career. Some of these, when published, he called 'prefaces'. One such commentary was written for the Tate Gallery in the early-1980s. It takes the form of an extended statement about the meaning and genesis of *The Murder of Rosa Luxemburg*. Much shorter texts, each derived from this original, subsequently appeared in Marco

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<sup>158</sup> Kitaj in Morphet, *RB Kitaj: A Retrospective*, 70.

<sup>159</sup> Lawrence Rainey, *The Annotated Waste Land with Eliot's Contemporary Prose*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006), 45.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

Livingstone's *Kitaj* (1984) and the Tate's *RB Kitaj: A Retrospective* catalogue (1994) and as captions on the Tate's website.<sup>161</sup> The tension between what Kitaj painted and what he wrote, both at the time and later, reveals the way his thoughts on this work changed over time and the complex range of meanings compacted within the painting.

### The Murder of Rosa Luxemburg

The painting is catalogue number 1 in *Pictures with Commentary Pictures without Commentary*, the booklet accompanying his first solo exhibition at Marlborough Fine Art, which was held in February 1963. This, perhaps, suggests its pre-eminence for the artist at that time.<sup>162</sup> It was purchased by EJ Power shortly after completion, prior to the Marlborough exhibition, and subsequently sold to the Tate Gallery in 1980.<sup>163</sup> Significantly, perhaps, it is one of the few pre-1970 paintings that he consistently included in his retrospective exhibitions, including the Tate retrospective of 1994.

The painting is oil on canvas, just over 1.5m square and bears the hallmarks of Kitaj's early style: it appears fragmentary in its organisation and in its imagery, and there are collaged elements applied to the canvas. The colour scheme is sombre, in keeping with the morbid subject-matter: tarry blacks, browns and ochres predominate. Only a strange blue and orange pyramid lightens the funereal palette. Formally, as with most

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<sup>161</sup> The Tate Gallery display caption, dated 2004, states: 'This is an early example of Kitaj's many paintings on the theme of the unjust infliction of human suffering. Its ostensible subject is the murder in 1919 of the Jewish agitator and theoretician Rosa Luxemburg, who was killed by troops opposed to the revolutionary movement that swept Germany in the wake of the First World War. In the centre of this painting a figure holds Luxemburg's corpse, while at top right is a collaged transcription of an account of the murder. Kitaj associated Luxemburg with his grandmother Helene, who was forced to flee Vienna in the 1930s. The veiled figure at top left represents his maternal grandmother, who fled Russia as a result of earlier pogroms of the Jewish people.' <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/kitaj-the-murder-of-rosa-luxemburg-t03082/text-display-caption> accessed 1.12.2015.

<sup>162</sup> The works are catalogued according to date and *The Murder of Rosa Luxemburg*, which had already been sold, is the only painting of 1960 included. This suggests that the canvas had some significance for Kitaj.

<sup>163</sup> The Irish-born Power was one of the most significant and far-sighted British collectors of the 1950s and 60s. Amongst the artists whose work he acquired were Rothko, Pollock, de Kooning, Picabia, Dubuffet, Warhol and Lichtenstein, as well as Kitaj, Blake and Hamilton.

of Kitaj's work at this time, it is a loose accretion of apparently disparate images. The composition divides into two registers, upper and lower, with the body of Luxemburg effectively dividing the picture horizontally. In the top half, reading from left to right, we find the head and shoulders of a veiled woman; the blue and orange pyramid; an elderly woman with tied-back hair, supporting the body of Rosa Luxemburg; a car driven by a soft-capped occupant; a curious mushroom-shaped cartouche<sup>164</sup> containing a monumental female-figure; a hand holding a phallic gun; and a sheet of handwritten notes glued to the canvas.<sup>165</sup> Below the body is a further collage of marbled paper with an applied plain sheet bearing the picture's title, again handwritten; a vignette featuring an obelisk-like monument in a hilly landscape; and a series of slashing lines that seem to support the body. In terms of facture, the imagery is drawn with a spidery line and filled-in with scabby, hasty-looking brushstrokes. The overall effect is deliberately abrasive and disturbing. At the same time, the drawing is fluid and confident: there appear to be no second thoughts except at top-right where some *pentimenti* have been largely obliterated by the sheet of notes. Whatever was erased represented the assassin, judging from what looks like spiky hair, a shoulder and the remaining hand and pistol.

The figure representing Luxemburg is black and sack-like. Her feet point in different directions; her arms flail like empty shirtsleeves; the rubber-lipped mouth lolls open revealing three peg teeth; half of the face seems to be missing. Kitaj's emphasis on the physical suffering of Luxemburg may seem distinctly morbid, but there are historical precedents for such an approach in Northern Renaissance depictions of the crucifixion and martyrdoms. Matthias Grünewald's *Isenheim Altarpiece* (1512-16) in

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<sup>164</sup> Read as the silhouette of a helmeted figure by John Lynch. See John Lynch, 'The Murder of Rosa Luxemburg: Monuments, Documents, Meanings' in *Critical Kitaj*, eds. James Aulich and John Lynch (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 60.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*, p59.

the Museum Unterlinden, Colmar, is one of the best-known examples. Here, the physical sufferings of Christ are detailed almost obsessively, not only in terms of the wounds inflicted but also in the way the entire body is shown to twist, flex and strain as if in spasms of pain. This is a far cry from the serene Crucifixions of the Italian world. Furthermore, in its apparently crude style and facture, Kitaj's work reveals the influence of his immediate predecessors and of his contemporaries. In post-Second World War Europe, manifestations of the abject in figurative art can be found in the work of Alberto Giacometti, Francis Bacon, Jean Dubuffet and numerous others. Of Kitaj's fellow Royal College students, David Hockney, perhaps, in works such as *First Love Painting*, also of 1960, exhibits a similarly self-consciously crude, graffiti-inflected figuration, resulting in a sort of spiky hangover from the Existentialism of the 1950s. Further afield, there are affinities between the Luxemburg canvas and the work of Kitaj's near contemporaries, the German painters Georg Baselitz and Eugen Schoenebeck.<sup>166</sup>

Schoenebeck, who worked closely with Georg Baselitz in the early 1960s, was trained in East Germany in the Social-Realist style before fleeing to West Berlin. He retired from the art world after a very brief career. Nevertheless, the canvases he created in this intense period are remarkable for their power and prescience. His early work, like Baselitz's, and like Kitaj's *Murder of Rosa Luxemburg*, takes the form of a scabrous variation on the abject. Schoenebeck was born near Dresden and, as a child, witnessed the devastation of the city at the end of the Second World War. Some of his most striking works are a series of crucifixions in which the figure is stunted, or disturbingly abbreviated, appearing to lack limbs or even a complete torso (fig. 15).

This brutalist abjection was a largely European phenomenon. Of Kitaj's likely

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<sup>166</sup> There is no evidence that Kitaj was aware of his German contemporaries at this time. I include them mainly to show how this type of abject figuration lingered on in Europe well into the 1960s.



American models for such an image, only De Kooning's *Woman* series stands out as a potential candidate. De Kooning certainly had some influence on the early Kitaj: he refers to the Dutchman's work in the preface he wrote for *Erasmus Variations* of 1958. But, whereas Rosa Luxemburg's toothy grin and fluid anatomy distantly recall de Kooning's women, the latter are bursting with earthy sexual energy – they are about life not death.

### Rosa Luxemburg

It is worth considering briefly the facts of Rosa Luxemburg's life, since they clearly have some bearing on the meaning of the painting. Luxemburg (1871-1919) was a leading Marxist thinker, economist and writer, whose political activities included the foundation, in 1915, along with Karl Liebknecht, of the revolutionary Marxist *Spartakusbund* (Spartacus League) which evolved into the *Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands* (Communist Party of Germany). Although she became a naturalised German citizen, Luxemburg was born in Zamosc, Poland, to an educated, assimilated Jewish family. Her father, educated in Berlin, was interested in current affairs and Western European literature. He was, in fact, to quote Luxemburg's early biographer Paul Frölich, one of

...that type which has produced the Jewish intellectual and found its highest development in world-famous Jewish artists, men of science and social pioneers<sup>167</sup>

The biography sketched in the afterword concluding the 1923 edition Luxemburg's *Letters from Prison* reinforces the impression of an a Jewish family fully integrated into the wider European culture.<sup>168</sup>

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<sup>167</sup> Paul Frölich (trans. Fitzgerald, E). *Rosa Luxemburg* (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd, 1940), 14.

<sup>168</sup> Kitaj's short bibliography refers to the 1946 edition. Kitaj, *Pictures With Commentary, Pictures without Commentary*, 5. In the Paris statement he writes that, 'As a student at the Royal College, I

The language of the household was not Yiddish, but Polish. The books the family read were not the *Talmud*, but the classics.<sup>169</sup>

Luxemburg's letters are fascinating documents. They reveal someone who is trying to keep her mind active through the study of the natural world and literature, and, through her correspondence, to comfort Sophie, wife of the similarly incarcerated Karl Liebknecht. They are bursting with details about the behaviour of birds and insects, whether remembered or observed within the prison grounds. Descriptions of plants abound and she even requests details of trees seen by Sophie and questions her closely about shared memories. She discusses literature, naturally including poets such as Goethe and Hölderlin, as well as contemporaries like Gerhart Hauptmann and, perhaps more surprisingly, John Galsworthy. What she does not do is refer to Judaism. When she alludes to religion at all, for instance in a description of Corsica, it is in these distinctly Christian terms:

next a great mule, on which sits a woman sideways, her legs hanging straight down, a child in her arms; she is bolt upright, slender as a cypress and makes no movement. Beside her strides a bearded man whose demeanour is calm and confident. Both are silent. You would take your oath that they are the Holy Family. Such a scene is frequently to be witnessed. Everytime I was so profoundly stirred that involuntarily I wanted to kneel, which is always my inclination when I see anything perfectly beautiful. There the Bible is still a living reality, and so is the classical world.<sup>170</sup>

That last sentence, together with an earlier reference to Homer, suggests that she saw things in firmly European cultural terms, grounded in the Classics, typical of the late-19<sup>th</sup> century middle-classes.

From 1915 on, the impact of the First World War led increasing numbers of Germans to ally themselves with the political left, in the form of organisations such as the

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came across Rosa Luxemburg's *Letters from Prison*. See <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/kitaj-the-murder-of-rosa-luxemburg-t03082/text-catalogue-entry> accessed 23.5.2014.

<sup>169</sup> Frölich, *Rosa Luxemburg*, 76.

<sup>170</sup> Rosa Luxemburg, (trans. Paul, Eden & Cedar) *Letters from Prison* (Berlin: Publishing House of the Young International, 1923), 16.

Social Democratic Party and the Independent Social Democratic Party. In 1919, political unrest within the imploding German Empire, following its defeat, led to the general strike and street battles which became known as the January Uprising or, alternatively, the Spartacist Uprising. Although the Spartacists did not, in fact, initiate the unrest, Liebknecht, unlike Luxemburg, did support it. Nevertheless, it was a doomed enterprise. The social democrat government called in the assistance of the *Freikorps*, a right-wing armed militia comprised of war veterans, and the insurrection was decisively crushed. In retaliation for the attempted coup, Liebknecht and Luxemburg were captured and murdered.

...Rosa Luxemburg was led from the Hotel Eden by Lieutenant Vogel. Before the door a trooper named Runge was waiting with orders from Lieutenant Vogel and Captain Horst von Pflugk-Hartung to strike her to the ground with the butt of his carbine. He smashed her skull with two blows and she was then lifted half-dead into a waiting car, accompanied by Lieutenant Vogel and a number of other officers. One of them struck her on the head with the butt of his revolver, and Lieutenant Vogel killed her with a shot in the head at point-blank range. The car stopped at the Liechtenstein bridge over the Landwehr Canal, and her corpse was then flung from the bridge into the water, from where it was not recovered until the following May.<sup>171</sup>

#### Kitaj's Early Rosa Luxemburg Texts

In addition to the notes physically attached to his paintings, Kitaj provides his own relatively brief notes to most of the works, sometimes including a bibliography, in his catalogue to *Pictures with Commentary Pictures without Commentary*. These texts are very different in tone from the prefaces he began to publish from the 1980s onwards, being terser, and in most cases more abbreviated. The notes to *The Murder of Rosa Luxemburg* are the first to appear in the catalogue. They constitute the first published text he wrote about the painting, leaving aside the notes on the canvas itself.

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<sup>171</sup> Frölich, *Rosa Luxemburg*, This is the text Kitaj transcribed onto the sheet glued to the canvas.

The prophetic murder of the remarkable woman Harold Laski called one of the greatest Socialist thinkers of our time is described in hand-written notes which occur in the upper right-hand corner of the painting.

The profile in the car window bears some resemblance to Field-Marshal Count von Moltke.

And to this brief statement he appended a short bibliography:

*Rosa Luxemburg. Her Life and Work.* P. Frolich (*sic*). London 1940

*Rosa Luxemburg.* Tony Cliff. London 1959

*Letters from Prison.* Rosa Luxemburg. London 1946

*Monuments to 'Genius' in German Classicism.* A. Neumeyer. (Journal of the Warburg Institute II 2 1938)

There is a good deal of irony at work in the early Kitaj, I think, which is easy to overlook. The scholarly equivocation of the phrase 'bears some resemblance to Field-Marshal Count von Moltke' is a case in point. Perhaps he is simply offering the viewer a gentle nudge in the right direction. But Kitaj, as the producer of the work, would know very well not only whether this figure *resembled* von Moltke but whether or not it was based on him or even meant to be him. If the figure does look like von Moltke, and broadly it does, (fig. 16) then that is because Kitaj drew it so. The same can be said of a vague reference to the German National Monument. According to the notes, 'a figure similar to the image at the left of this sheet surmounts the German national monument, Niederwald'. The figure is not just similar: it is, in fact, almost identical (fig. 17).

Who, in any case, was von Moltke and what does he have to do with Rosa Luxemburg? Field-Marshal Helmuth Graf von Moltke (1800-1891) was a soldier, military strategist, writer and artist. The style of cap and high collar worn by the figure in the car recall the fashions of early to mid-nineteenth century Prussia and the features do indeed resemble those of von Moltke. Amongst his other achievements,

von Moltke was one of the engineers of German unification, alongside Bismarck and Albrecht von Roon, and his rethinking of Prussian military strategy was a significant contribution to the *Realpolitik* which led, ultimately, to the declaration of the German Empire in 1871. It was to commemorate this event that the Niederwald Monument, surmounted by a personification of Germania was erected near Rüdesheim am Rhein, the first stone being laid on 1<sup>st</sup> September, 1871. It is this monument which appears in Kitaj's painting. Luxemburg was born ten years after von Moltke's death, so Kitaj's introduction of the idea of von Moltke and the declaration of the German Empire into the mix of the painting (and he did this at the time, not retrospectively, for the evidence is pasted to the canvas) must have had purpose during the image's gestation.

Further significant allusions to German history emerge on closer inspection. The name of the trooper to strike the first blow, Otto Runge, for instance, inevitably calls to mind Phillip Otto Runge (1777-1810), one of German Romanticism's greatest portraitists, a colour-theorist and friend of Goethe. This, clearly, is coincidence in historical terms but is indicative of the oscillating readings and associations Kitaj's canvas provokes, as was undoubtedly his intention. That a right-wing thug should bear the name of a significant artist, and someone in regular correspondence with Germany's national poet, is an irony of the darkest shade.

Kitaj's reference to the Neumeyer article reveals the source for the obelisk and the pyramid which appear on the left of the canvas. These structures very clearly have their origins in some of the illustrations to Neumeyer's text, namely Janus Genelli's watercolour *Monument to Kant* of 1808 (fig. 18) and H. Danneker's aquatint *Monument to Frederick the Great and his Generals* (fig. 19) respectively. However, Neumeyer's essay includes other illustrations that also seem to have a bearing on the genesis of *The Murder of Rosa Luxemburg*. Plates 29c and 29d of the *Journal of the*

*Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* essay are of George Carter's *Apotheosis of Garrick* of 1783 (fig. 20) and Daniel Chodowiecki's engraving *Apotheosis of Frederick the Great* of 1791 (fig. 21) respectively. Both have as their central subject a recumbent figure being borne aloft, in a manner that recalls a Baroque Piéta or an Assumption of the Virgin, and both clearly inform or, at least, relate to the composition of Kitaj's canvas, in which the dead body of Luxemburg is similarly supported by at least one, possibly two, figures. Although the composition is reversed, *The Murder of Rosa Luxemburg* appears to be quite closely based on the Chodowiecki print, which amongst other things also includes a pyramid in one corner, supporters seen in profile and even a veiled figure. This subtle evocation of Frederick the Great within the composition of the Luxemburg canvas further deepens the German context of the image. In which case, it seems more relevant to read the canvas not as a pieta but as an apotheosis, a deification. If this is the case, it has a clear relation to the literature on Luxemburg, which is deeply hagiographic in tone, certainly in the examples Kitaj cites. The Afterword to the 1923 edition of *Letters from Prison*, for instance, is a straightforward piece of hagiography in which there is plenty to suggest Luxemburg as a secular saint, worthy of an apotheosis.

Not only because she was, in theory, in heart and soul, and in activity, an internationalist, but because she was a great spirit and a great soul, does Rosa Luxemburg belong to *all* the world. ... The soul that sets out upon the great search for truth, for beauty, and for freedom traverses the whole world – perchance the whole Universe – and belongs to *all*, even as it embraces *all*.<sup>172</sup>

And again

The struggles of the working class are and must be bitter always, dark sometimes, hopeless appearing often, but now and then a gleam from the torch

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<sup>172</sup> Luxemburg, *Letters from Prison*, 81.

that Rosa Luxemburg carried so high must light the path for a moment, must bring new hope and new strength.<sup>173</sup>

#### Warburg, Saxl, Serpents and a Banquet

As we have seen, Kitaj's catalogue notes direct the viewer to a specific article by Neumeyer in the *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*. In his essay, 'Iconology as Theme in the Early Work of RB Kitaj', Marco Livingstone refers briefly to some paintings which are, wholly or in part, drawn from the illustrations in the *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*. In the course of his argument, however, he remarks that

It is not my intention to go on a source hunting expedition: indeed Kitaj's habit, in the early 1960s, of identifying many of the references himself, either by writing them on the painting or by listing them in catalogue notes, makes this critical activity redundant.<sup>174</sup>

Well, up to a point it does. However, going on such a hunting trip often reveals sources Kitaj omits to mention and that, of those he does, some are dead ends. Livingstone's attitude also, I think, tends to neglect the possibility that the notes, references, and later the prefaces, are in some sense part of the work. They do not simply function as sources revealed, as, for instance, when Francis Bacon says a scream is based on a still from *Eisenstein's Battleship Potemkin*. Kitaj's early catalogues are, for all their brevity, complex publications, employing a subtle use of imagery (including details) and the artist's text. In a sense, they should be seen as artist's books not conventional catalogues. They continue the artist's dialogue with his work and further his exploration of themes and concerns in their own right.

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<sup>173</sup> Luxemburg, *Letters from Prison*, 82.

<sup>174</sup> Marco Livingstone, 'Iconology as Theme in the Early Work of RB Kitaj', *Burlington Magazine*, Vol. 122, No. 928, July 1980, 488 & 490-497.

Kitaj was consulting an academic publication, the *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, which obviously contains essays by other authors in addition to Neumeyer, one of whom is Edgar Wind. Wind began his career, significantly enough, with the Warburg Institute before moving to the USA to teach at various universities. He returned to England after the Second World War to take up the position of Professor of Art History at the University of Oxford. Here it was he met Kitaj, then a student at the Ruskin School, and proceeded to introduce the young art student to the work of the Warburg Institute. The liveliness of this relationship is clear from correspondence dating from 1993 between Margaret, Wind's widow, and Kitaj: 'still vivid in my memory', she wrote, 'is your visit to Belsyre Court one afternoon many years ago.'<sup>175</sup> The title of Wind's article is, suggestively enough, 'The Revolution of History Painting'. The essay is accompanied by images which also have a bearing on Kitaj's canvas: some of the illustrations resemble pietas or apotheoses. But the text itself raises some interesting issues for Kitaj's treatment of an historic event. In it Wind examines the development of history painting in England in the late-18<sup>th</sup> century with particular reference to the work of John Singleton Copley and Benjamin West, artists (American artists, at that) who, he argues with characteristic elegance, helped reinvigorate the genre by applying it to contemporary events. Much of the essay is concerned with the conflict between the need for historical accuracy and the conventional demand for heroism to be depicted in an appropriately grand manner, meaning the transposition of the narrative into a Classical setting. Put simply, for 18<sup>th</sup> century academicians, including Reynolds, the idea of elevating a contemporary instance whilst retaining recognisable participants wearing modern dress, broke all the

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<sup>175</sup> Kitaj had written to her asking for a photograph of Wind for the Morphet's Tate catalogue. Chaney, Edward Chaney, 'Warburgian Artist: RB Kitaj, Edgar Wind, Ernst Gombrich, and the Warburg Institute' in Gillen, *Obsessions: RB Kitaj 1932 – 2007*, 101.



academic rules.<sup>176</sup> Benjamin West, on the other hand, tackling the subject of General Wolfe's death in Canada twenty years earlier, considered that

The event to be commemorated happened in the year 1759, in a region of the world unknown to the Greeks or Romans, and at a period of time when no warriors who wore such costume existed. The subject I have to represent is a great battle fought and won, and the same truth which gives law to the historian should rule the painter.<sup>177</sup>

However, at the end of the day, the point is that they still employed a rhetoric of gesture and attitude that derived from historic sources. By the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, this entire genre had largely degenerated into triviality and absurdity.

Arguably, it was replaced by a form of history painting which had its roots in Spain, specifically in the work of Goya.<sup>178</sup> In canvases such as *Tres de Mayo* and the etchings of *Disasters of War*, Goya brings an immediacy to the depiction of historic events that West could never have conceived. When Kitaj came to paint Rosa Luxemburg, the situation had changed again. The ability of the camera to capture the immediacy of events had rendered any attempt to paint, in Wind's phrase, 'pictorial news' difficult, to say the least, and this was made worse by the subversive antics of the Dadaists and their heirs, early Pop artists such as Larry Rivers, for instance, whose 1953 painting *Washington Crossing the Delaware* manages, amongst other things, to successfully send up the visual rhetoric of Emmanuel Gottlieb Leutze's iconic original of 1851. Notwithstanding his iconoclastic handling of an image familiar to Americans from high-school, Rivers aim was to connect with the very artists of the Grand Manner he ostensibly sought to subvert.

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<sup>176</sup> Edgar Wind, 'The Revolution in History Painting', *The Journal of the Warburg Institute*, vol. II, no. 2, (October 1938), 116.

<sup>177</sup> Wind, *Journal of the Warburg Institute*, 116.

<sup>178</sup> Werner Hofmann, 'Picasso's Guernica in its Historical Context,' *Artibus et Historiae*, vol 4, no 7 (1983), 141.

It is significant to note that arguably the most significant, and revered, history painting of the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, Picasso's *Guernica* of 1937, an image directly prompted by the Spanish Civil War, actually reverses the trend described by Wind. Picasso aimed to universalise his subject by representing it via archetypes largely of his own invention but, importantly, informed by the art of Classical Greece and Rome. Fritz Saxl, Director of the Warburg Institute, concludes his *Lectures* with a brief discussion of Picasso's painting, employing it to underline the importance of wider context in addition to formal appreciation in order to fully grasp the meaning of a work of art.

... assume that a historian three hundred years hence would not know exactly why and under what circumstances [Guernica] was painted and would just try to understand it as a document of twentieth century artistic vision. He could certainly understand it as one of many documents of horror of this period. But without knowing that it represents Guernica, that it was painted immediately after the event for the Spanish Pavilion of the Paris World Fair in order to make thousands see it and to warn them of Fascism, how little would this fictitious historian of art of the future understand about Picasso and his work, and how little could his art criticism contribute to the general knowledge of our period.<sup>179</sup>

*Guernica* works for a modern audience precisely because it does not attempt to literally represent a historical event but, instead, forges what could be described as a parallel representation. There are no bomber aircraft, there is no local topography, only fear, panic and death. The title alone anchors the painting to a particular time and place. Moreover, Picasso did not attempt the memorialisation of a single, 'heroic' figure, but the civilian population of a Basque town. Picasso, like Goya, as the art historian Werner Hofmann puts it, 'postulates a new hero: the vanquished takes the place of the vanquisher, the defeated speak more convincingly than the defeater.'<sup>180</sup>

<sup>179</sup> Fritz Saxl, *Lectures*, (London: Warburg Institute, 1957) 355-6.

<sup>180</sup> Hofmann, *Artibus et Historiae*, 142.

It will be seen that Kitaj does something very similar in his Luxemburg painting. We are shown an event unfolding – its title emphasises this – it is *the murder*. But the focus is on the victim, rather than the action of the killer. Although the assassin remains, he is largely obliterated by the notes – a point to which I will return. Like Picasso, Kitaj has also chosen an essentially monochromatic palette for his painting. Kitaj's problem is that there is no longer a broad culture to which his paintings can speak and be understood. As a reader of Warburg and his circle, Kitaj was conscious of the historic language of images that could be read, at least in theory, but his own circumstances, working in the fallout from Modernism, denied that possibility. This may explain his reliance on texts to support his imagery. As the art historian Michael Podro puts it

Painting is unlike literature because language can be part of political action and at the same time saturated with complicated meaning. And the poet or historian can retrace the action through the language. But painting and the historical facts never engage each other so easily. And for Kitaj there was neither a socially or morally charged imagery he could take for granted and deploy, nor a range of factual reference which he could assume his spectator could take for granted and draw upon.<sup>181</sup>

Kitaj's use of language can be read as a crib or gloss to guide the viewer through the painting. These sources serve to thicken the texture of an image which is, amongst other things, a meditation on German history. The Romantic idealism which went into the making of a unified Germany degenerated within fifty years into the shambles out of which emerged Nazism.

Amongst Kitaj's works contemporary with *The Murder of Rosa Luxemburg*, one of closest stylistically and thematically is *Red Banquet*. Both, for instance, orbit around

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<sup>181</sup> Podro, Michael, 'Some notes on Ron Kitaj', *Art International*, vol 22, no 10 (March 1979), 18-19. Also quoted in Aulich & Lynch, *Critical Kitaj*, 64.

events related to 19<sup>th</sup> and early-20<sup>th</sup> century Leftist politics. The *Red Banquet*, for instance, at its simplest level, documents the occasion when, in Kitaj's own words:

In February 1854, Mr Saunders, the American Consul, gave a banquet to a dozen of the principal foreign refugees in London. Among the guests were Alexander Herzen, Garibaldi, Mazzini, Orsini, Kossuth, Ledru-Rollin, Worcell, and other refugee leaders. The party was completed by the American Ambassador James Buchanan, a future President of the United States.<sup>182</sup>

The painting accordingly includes portraits of Russian Anarchist Herzen, a figure probably representing James Buchanan (in green, sporting a snake collared to his chest) and either Giuseppe Garibaldi or Felice Orsini, who appears in profile to the right of Buchanan. Also attending Kitaj's version of events is Bakunin, although he was not, in fact, present at the historic banquet.<sup>183</sup> The architecture featured in this canvas is Le Corbusier's *Les Terrasses*, at Garches, in the suburbs of Paris. A photograph of this building, clearly Kitaj's source, is reproduced as plate 62a of Fritz Saxl's *Lectures*. Saxl does not actually discuss the building, he uses it instead to discuss the relationship between art and science and, inter alia, between the figures and the architecture in Renaissance paintings such as those by Duccio and Domenico Veneziano.<sup>184</sup> In essence, his theme is the tension between rationality and irrationality, and this, I think, can be seen as the fundamental theme both of *The Red Banquet* and *The Murder of Rosa Luxemburg*.

Marco Livingstone discusses this aspect of the work in an extended account of the canvas:

The references to pictographs tie up with Warburg's visit to the American Indians in 1895-6, described by Fritz Saxl as 'a journey to the archetypes', during which he formed his conclusions on the persistence of visual symbols in 'the social memory'. As a specific example, Saxl cited the Indian representation of lightning in the form of a snake, an image that is found in

<sup>182</sup> Kitaj, quoted in Gillen, *RB Kitaj 1932-2007: Obsessions* (Berlin: Jewish Museum 2012), 21.

<sup>183</sup> Gillen, *RB Kitaj 1932-2007: Obsessions*, 21.

<sup>184</sup> Saxl, *Lectures*, 111-113.

Kitaj's *The Red Banquet*, both in the rain clouds and in the snake-like form of the pictograph-derived figure at the far right. The imagery of this painting, in fact, derives largely from illustrations to Saxl's *Lectures*, particularly from the discussion concerning the interrelationship of art and science as the meeting of two separate realms of facts, 'the world of rational experience and that of magic'.<sup>185</sup>

The fact that *Red Banquet* alludes to Hopi snake symbolism, as Livingstone rightly says, makes it as certain as can be that Saxl's *Lectures* was the primary source for the various elements of the painting. Saxl talks about this snake imagery in connection with Warburg's visit to New Mexico, in the United States, in 1895-6.<sup>186</sup> On this trip, Warburg made an expedition to a Hopi Pueblo. Traditionally, in Hopi cosmology, lightning was depicted as a rattlesnake and Warburg conducted an experiment with a group of the village schoolchildren (who were already under the influence of European, specifically Roman Catholic culture) in which they were asked to make a picture of a thunderstorm. Although eight of the children drew conventional – that is, European – Z-shaped lightning, Warburg was delighted to find that two still drew it as snakes. A further investigation into drawings by Cleo Jurino, a Hopi man, and his son also revealed the persistence of snake imagery within the Hopi cosmology.

Warburg's lecture in which he outlines his finding, entitled 'A Lecture on the Serpent Ritual', was given on 25<sup>th</sup> April 1923, and first published in English translation in the April 1939 *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*.<sup>187</sup> As Kitaj owned a set of the early volumes, he must have been aware of the lecture itself, in addition to Saxl's account of it. Clearly, some of the imagery within *Red Banquet* is drawn from these sources. But this does not, in itself, help elucidate the meaning of the work.

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<sup>185</sup> Livingstone, *RB Kitaj*, 14-15.

<sup>186</sup> Saxl's title, *Warburg's Visit to New Mexico*, is also the title of Kitaj's second collaboration with Eduardo Paolozzi.

<sup>187</sup> Aby Warburg, 'A Lecture on the Serpent Ritual,' *Journal of the Warburg Institute*, vol. 2, no. 4 (Apr., 1939), 277-292.

Warburg lectured on the Serpent Ritual in 1923 – some twenty-seven years, that is, after he made the journey to the United States.<sup>188</sup> The lecture was, in fact, delivered at the Kreuzlingen sanatorium, in which Warburg was a patient following his mental breakdown, as a means to convince his doctors that he was well enough to leave. The tension between reason and unreason had very real significance for Warburg. And the lecture, in which he underlines the ritual as a means for the Hopi to overcome the snake-demons, was a way for Warburg to show, as David Freedberg puts it, ‘his own mastery of and distance from his personal demons’.<sup>189</sup>

This is not the place to discuss the extent and nature of Warburg’s understanding of the Hopi. But it is worth considering the extent and nature of Kitaj’s understanding of Warburg. *The Red Banquet* draws certain elements of its imagery from Warburg via Saxl. The strange elongated figure on the right of the canvas bears some similarity with the snake drawings illustrated in the *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* – note, for instance, the dart-like tongue, an inversion of the v-shaped tongue of a real snake. Rain falls from a solitary cloud over Buchanan’s head and, as mentioned above, he bears a snake on his chest. The setting for the figures is Le Corbusier’s Modernist villa, the epitome of modern European culture. One might argue from this that, like Saxl, possibly even like Warburg, Kitaj is contrasting the irrational (the snake-symbol) with the rational (the architecture). But the snake appears twice in the *Red Banquet*: as a collage on Buchanan’s chest, and as an elongated figure on the right of the image. It is this latter figure, with its sinuous form and dart-like tongue with refers to the Hopi drawings illustrated in Warburg’s lecture.

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<sup>188</sup> In fact, Warburg never saw the Snake Dance and the degree to which he understood the culture of the Hopi people is debatable, to say the least. See, *inter alia*, Freedberg’s analysis of Warburg’s New Mexico expedition and the lecture: David Freedberg, ‘Warburg’s Mask: A Study in Idolatry’, in *Anthropologies of Art*, edited by Mariet Westerman (Williamstown: Clark Institute, 2005), 3-25.

<sup>189</sup> David Freedberg, *Pathos at Oraibi: What Warburg did not see*. (downloadable manuscript), 10. <http://www.columbia.edu/cu/arthistory/faculty/Freedberg/index.html> accessed 8.7.2015.

The collaged snake, though clearly emphasizing the Warburg-snake-symbol connection, has a very different meaning. It takes the form of an engraving pasted directly onto the canvas. This print shows a conventional, undulating serpent above the phrase 'Don't tread on me'. The snake, though vigorous enough, is chopped into segments. So far as I can tell, this has nothing to do with Hopi culture specifically. On the other hand, it does have a lot to do with American history, for it is a variation on a cartoon drawn by Benjamin Franklin originally entitled *Join or Die*, (fig. 22) first published in *The Pennsylvania Gazette*, 9 May 1754. The significance of this device was to illustrate the need for the various colonies to unify in the face of a threat of the French coming via Canada. Within the Warburgian matrix of Kitaj's painting, all of this takes on denser meaning when we recall that Benjamin Franklin was, in addition to his political activities, a pioneer in the science of electricity. Most famously, perhaps, he experimented with a kite in a storm to prove the electrical nature of the very thing which the snake symbolizes for the Hopi: lightning.

#### Kitaj's 1982 Paris Statement

Kitaj's later statement about *The Murder of Rosa Luxemburg* can be found on the Tate Gallery's website amalgamated into the catalogue notes for the painting. The website describes it as dated 'Paris 1982'. This means it was written over twenty years after the picture was painted and places it to the year he lived in the French capital:

... the happiest year of my life for a hundred crazy reasons. I felt hidden away in time and romance and I found or invented some of the lost Paris which people said was gone – the Paris of Henry Miller and René Clair. I should have staid put in that dreamworld I stumbled into.<sup>190</sup>

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<sup>190</sup> Morphet, *RB Kitaj: A Retrospective*, 63.

The Tate statement is important for a number of reasons. First, it reads like a conventional exposition of motives on the part of the artist – he is not playing ironic scholar, this time. Second, it is the blueprint for subsequent prefaces to this canvas written by Kitaj. And, third, it has provided other writers with an interpretive key to the painting. On that first point, the statement takes on a particular authority: here we have the artist seeming to explore some of the ideas or concerns behind his work. In the course of the statement, Kitaj firmly places the painting within the context of anti-Semitism. And he introduces the biographical element of his two grandmothers: his mother's mother Rose (or Rosa) Brooks; his stepfather's mother, Helene Kitaj; and explains how persecution, by the Russians and Nazis, respectively, forced both to flee Europe for America. He begins, typically enough, in a rather gruffly apologetic way

This was a student work, begun while I was at the Royal College of Art. It looks naive and graceless to me now, but the more I contemplate it, the thing begins to assume, in its failings and impatience, at least some of the terms of its genesis, terms which really interested me, and still do 20 years later.<sup>191</sup>

In 1960, Kitaj was still a student at the RCA. But describing the painting in this way encourages us to see it as a callow work. And, whilst it may be reasonable of him to see it as the awkward utterance of an artist still searching for his own voice, it was not the work of a youth but of a man in his late twenties and married with a son. In the course of the text, Kitaj makes the point of yoking German Romanticism with Fascism and the imagery of his painting:

Another fellowship, suspected by some, is the bonding of Fascism and a degenerated Romanticism, of which National Socialism became, as it were, the ass-end. That bond, too, is suggested in the imagery at the bottom left. Ernest Gellner, in a recent comic aside about World War II, called it the war against German Romanticism!<sup>192</sup>

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<sup>191</sup> RB Kitaj, 'The Murder of Rosa Luxemburg (1960-1962)', statement dated 'Paris1982', <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/kitaj-the-murder-of-rosa-luxemburg-t03082/text-catalogue-entry> accessed 3.1.2016.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid.



By the second paragraph he is warming to his theme, stating unequivocally:

The picture arose out of a meditation upon two of my grandmothers. (There had been a third.) It is about an historic murder but it is really about murdering Jews, which is what brought my grandmothers to America.<sup>193</sup>

Regarding the veiled female, Kitaj uses the word *wraith* ('Grandma Rose is given as her veiled *wraith*') and the figure certainly has a spectral appearance. In fact, her features recall those of Rosa Luxemburg. Of particular note, here, is the way he tends to narrow down the picture's meaning: 'it is really about murdering Jews'.

Only once in the course of the Paris statement does Kitaj refer to his concerns as they were recorded at the time he was actually working on the painting.

I can see in my journal for the period that I could not decide what to call this picture. I had been mooning over Rilke's *Duino* and my journal tells me I preferred "Elegy" to "Dirge" or "Threnody" because the grandmother theme was to be stated only obliquely (an accursed practice of mine), in the way Rilke was not really mourning the dead, but lamenting human weakness. And so, before the idea of the Banality of Evil became current and controversial (Arendt's *Eichmann*), I sought to cast my theme in a representation of thugs doing their thing.<sup>194</sup>

Rilke's sequence of poems, written throughout and after the First World War, in some ways reflects his experience of the conflict and subsequent disintegration of central Europe. If the *Elegies* were amongst Kitaj's reading whilst at work, it does not seem so unreasonable to assume that their atmosphere – a variant of high German Romanticism – contributed to the mood of the painting. Having said that, his reference to possible titles such as *Elegy* or *Dirge* suggests a further level of poetic reference to TS Eliot. As we have seen, the Kitaj of this period was deeply interested in Eliot's work. Indeed, by his own admission, Eliot's use of notes to *The Waste Land* had, suggested his own use of notes and texts to his paintings. *Elegy* and *Dirge*, his

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<sup>193</sup> RB Kitaj, 'The Murder of Rosa Luxemburg (1960-1962)', statement dated 'Paris1982', <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/kitaj-the-murder-of-rosa-luxemburg-t03082/text-catalogue-entry> accessed 3.1.2016.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid.

‘preferred’ titles for the painting back in 1960, are also the titles of two verse fragments TS Eliot composed around the same time as *The Waste Land*. *Dirge* is, in fact, an elaboration of Ariel’s song from *The Tempest* in which he taunts Ferdinand with the fate of his presumed drowned father, Alonso

Full fathom five your Bleistein lies  
 Under the flatfish and the squids.  
 Grave’s disease in a dead Jew’s eyes!  
 When the crabs have eat the lids.  
 Lower than the wharf rats dive  
 Though he suffer a sea change<sup>195</sup>

These lines, describing a submerged corpse, seem startlingly apt for *The Murder of Rosa Luxemburg*, given the disposal of her body in the Landwehr Canal. In view of Eliot’s overt anti-Semitism, Kitaj’s later insistence on the Jewish theme of his painting takes on a fresh significance. Nor should we forget that *The Waste Land* itself contains a section entitled *Death by Water*, which concerns a drowned body.

A current under sea  
 Picked his bones in whispers. As he rose and fell  
 He passed the stages of his age and youth  
 Entering the whirlpool.  
 Gentile or Jew  
 O you who turn the wheel and look to windward,  
 Consider Phlebas, who was once tall and handsome as you.<sup>196</sup>

The drafts for the Paris statement can be found in a journal amongst the Kitaj Papers in the Special Collections Library at the University of California at Los Angeles. The

<sup>195</sup> TS Eliot, (ed. Valerie Eliot), *The Waste Land: A Facsimile and Transcript of the Original Drafts Including the Annotations of Ezra Pound* (London and Boston: Faber and Faber, 1971), 121.

<sup>196</sup> TS Eliot, *Collected Poems 1909-1962* (London: Faber & Faber, 1974, reset 2002), 65.

journal has black, hardback covers with a red, clothbound spine and corners. It was bought in Paris: indeed, it still bears the yellow Gibert Jeune price tag on the back. This must have been acquired during the Paris sojourn, between 1981 and 1982. ('You belong to me and all Paris belongs to me and I belong to this notebook and this pencil,' as Hemingway puts it in *A Moveable Feast*.)<sup>197</sup> To clinch matters, he refers in the text to his grandmother 'just' turning 100 in 1981, so it could not have been drafted earlier than then. The first draft opens like this

This painting, from 1962, [*sic*] is an oblique and not too oblique homage to my grandmother, Helene Kitaj, who ~~just~~ turned 100 in 1981 in Ohio.<sup>198</sup>

Kitaj has scored out the word 'just', which probably means he must have written it shortly after her birthday and then revised it. He dates the painting to 1962, (indeed, the heading to the statement dates the painting 1960-62) contradicting all published catalogue details, including the 1963 Marlborough publication. This may simply be a mistake, although it does perhaps deliberately raise the possibility that it was painted slightly later than was thought.<sup>199</sup>

At one point, he clearly intended to give greater prominence to the Russian Pogroms.

The following passage was omitted from the final version:

Long before Hitler, Jews were being murdered in Russia, as everyone knows. And the Ukraine has always been a particular playing-field of this historic and traditional game called Pogrom (meaning massacre in Russian). My maternal grandparents sought and found a very new life in America at the turn of the century, leaving the Ukraine and murder behind.<sup>200</sup>

He goes on:

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<sup>197</sup> Ernest Hemingway, *A Moveable Feast* (London: Vintage Books, 2000), 5.

<sup>198</sup> RB Kitaj, unpublished journal, UCLA RB Kitaj Collection (1741) Box 7, Folder 4.

<sup>199</sup> Kitaj could be vague about dates. He gave a surviving copy of his sculpture *Black Mountain* (from the LACMA *Art & Technology Project*) to a friend shortly before returning to the USA in 1996, inscribing it 'Black Mountain 1966?' In fact, it dates from 1969-70. See Chapter 4, 184, and fig 64.

<sup>200</sup> Kitaj, unpublished journal, UCLA, RB Kitaj Collection (1741), Box 7, Folder 4.

When my own son was born in Oxford, in 1958, my grandfather was appalled that we named him Anton and wrote me that Anton was a most typical name he associated with the Cossack Killers called The Black Hundred, who regularly preyed on Jews when he was young. Even though my wife was not Jewish and I was not, in those days much interested, (except obliquely), in Jewishness, my son has been called by his other name, Lem, ever since.<sup>201</sup>

In the end, this section was not included in the final statement, either. Kitaj marked it with a large X and emphatically wrote ‘NOT for Rosa but Babel!’ This must presumably refer to *Isaac Babel Riding with Budyonny*, (fig. 23) another early canvas in the Tate’s collection. A statement or preface about that canvas has not surfaced to date, but we can, I think, infer from that note that he planned to write one, and that this piece of family history would be used to ground that canvas in autobiography, in much the same way as the two grandmothers are meant to ground *The Murder of Rosa Luxemburg*.

There is also a further inference to be made about these memoirs – I do not know how else to describe them – and this is that they are to some degree interchangeable. He initially recounted the Anton story when writing about Rosa Luxemburg and then changed his mind – it would no longer be ‘for Rosa but Babel’. But this introduces an element of instability into the whole statement. No doubt all of these stories are true but whether they were in his mind in 1960, whether or to what extent they fuelled the painting of *The Murder of Rosa Luxemburg* or, indeed, *Isaac Babel Riding with Budyonny* is open to question, particularly as the latter was painted in 1962 – two years after the former. There is also the issue of how far we should be prepared to accept the statement as an accurate reflection of Kitaj’s thinking in 1960 when he manages to get wrong such an easily verifiable fact as the date of *The Murder of Rosa Luxemburg*: as I have already pointed out, in the statement he dates it to 1962.

Moreover, all of the iconography in *The Murder of Rosa Luxemburg* orbits around the

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<sup>201</sup> Kitaj, unpublished journal, UCLA, RB Kitaj Collection (1741), Box 7, Folder 4.

formation and disintegration of the German Empire, not the Russian Pogroms. Of course, as part of his personal family culture, these stories may well have been fermenting away in his mind all of the time, as these things do. Babel's story collection *Red Cavalry* is graphically about the pogroms of Eastern Europe and the role the Cossacks played in them.

Right outside the house a couple of Cossacks were getting ready to shoot an old silver-bearded Jew for espionage. The old man was screeching, and tried to break free. Kudya from the machine gun detachment grabbed his head and held it wedged under his arm. The Jew fell silent and spread his legs. Kudrya pulled out his dagger with his right hand and carefully cut the old man's throat without spattering himself.<sup>202</sup>

Interestingly, the painting Kitaj made, apparently in response, does not obviously dwell on the violence of Babel's stories; rather it marks the beginning of a shift away from a sort of belated post-war expressionism towards a stylistic engagement with Russian modernists such as Malevich. In contrast, *The Murder of Rosa Luxemburg* verbally and visually foregrounds violence.

Kitaj's son, a screenwriter professionally known as Lem Dobbs, was born Anton Lemuel Kitaj on 24 December 1959. He confirms the Anton story in a 2010 interview:

Lem is short for Lemuel, which is my middle name and the one I preferred from early childhood. Just as my father hated the name Ronald and so used initials, I didn't care for my given name Anton (and neither did aged relatives of my dad's upon hearing it, as it recalled Cossacks bearing down on them at full gallop).<sup>203</sup>

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<sup>202</sup> Isaac Babel (trans. Peter Constantine), *Red Cavalry* (New York and London: WW Norton & Co, 2002), 106-7.

<sup>203</sup> <http://www.cosmoetica.com/DSI21.htm> accessed 31.8.2012. *The Dan Schneider Interview 21: Lem Dobbs* (first posted 1/25/10).

### The Visual and the Textual Image

Kitaj's use of text at the time of working on a canvas and later clearly throws up numerous potential and at times contradictory readings. Having analysed some instances of this, it is time to ask what the broader meaning of this activity meant to the artist. Critical responses to these texts range from the sceptical to the hostile – at least some of the antagonism towards the Tate Retrospective appears to have been triggered by the prefaces displayed alongside the paintings themselves. It may be appropriate then to bear in mind that numerous instances and whole traditions of combining text and image can be found from in earlier European and non-European art. Many medieval and early-Renaissance artists, particularly within the German printmaking tradition – Albrecht Dürer, for instance – inserted explanatory texts into their images. Kitaj would have been perfectly aware of such works, if only through his perusal of the *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*. Similarly, the East Asian graphic tradition habitually combines image and text. Again, Kitaj was keenly appreciative of Japanese artists and photographs of his Los Angeles studio, taken after his death, reveal bookshelves bearing heavy catalogues devoted to Hokusai and Utamaro. Perhaps the shock of Kitaj's use of text, which remains to some extent even to this day, is in its pushing us out of the picture into other areas. He creates a hybrid art form. High modernism had introduced the concept of the autonomous art object but Kitaj's use of texts refutes this idea.<sup>204</sup> John Lynch discusses the implications of Kitaj's retrospective texts and their meanings for *The Murder of Rosa Luxemburg*. For him, there is an issue because 'given Barthes' observation that "The birth of the

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<sup>204</sup> Kitaj was not alone in this. In 1962, Richard Hamilton published notes for his canvas *She* in *Architectural Digest*, perhaps following the example of Marcel Duchamp's notes in the *Boîte en valise*. For a further discussion of Hamilton's use of text see Alex Potts, *Experiments in Modern Realism: World Making, Politics and the Everyday in Postwar European and American Art* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2013) 179.

reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author”, it could be argued that the flip side of the liberal urge to explain is an (author)itarian impulse to maintain control of what is fundamentally a public exchange.<sup>205</sup> Furthermore, it can be argued that the extraction of meaning from a work comes about through a complex interaction between reader, author and work in which the reader tests proposed readings against the work and the author’s intentions (however open to question they may be).

If Lynch has issues with Kitaj’s texts because they suggest a (neurotic) desire on the part of the artist to maintain control of meaning, David Peters Corbett sees them as problematic because they deny the image autonomy as a purely visual artefact. In essence, he suggests that the use of text asserts the primacy of the word over the image. ‘The changes that are wrought’ by Kitaj’s use of texts, he argues, ‘amount to a reduction of the status of the visual work itself.’<sup>206</sup> If words present history as a logical progression to be understood, images present it as an open-ended simultaneity of events, which is how we experience it. On the other hand, Kitaj’s work of all periods is insistently, even flamboyantly visual, as Peters Corbett admits:

The referencing out to the verbal as mechanism for connecting the painting with the world and experience is called into question and made problematic by the re-emergence of the visual as an independent and non-verbal mode of analysis.<sup>207</sup>

This view has affinities with the position argued by Michael Podro, which I quoted earlier: ‘Painting is unlike literature because language can be part of political action and at the same time saturated with complicated meaning.’<sup>208</sup>

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<sup>205</sup> Lynch, in Aulich & Lynch, *Critical Kitaj*, 64.

<sup>206</sup> David Peters Corbett, ‘Authority and Visual Experience: Word and Image in RB Kitaj’ in Aulich & Lynch, *Critical Kitaj*, 50.

<sup>207</sup> Peters Corbett, in Aulich & Lynch, *Critical Kitaj*, 54.

<sup>208</sup> Podro, *Art International*, 18-19. Also quoted in Aulich & Lynch, *Critical Kitaj*, 64.

Are Lynch, Peters Corbett and Podro right to worry about the interplay between image and text in Kitaj's work? Their position seems to imply that a work of art can be read on its own terms without ancillary information or, at least, that providing further information in some way demotes the visual work. Perhaps it is possible to counter their reservations with the observation Saxl made about *Guernica*. His hypothetical 24<sup>th</sup> century art historian, without contemporary references or guides, might be able to understand the painting as 'one of the many documents of horror of the period:'

But without knowing that it represents Guernica ... how little would this fictitious historian of art of the future understand about Picasso and his work...<sup>209</sup>

Furthermore, what exactly was Kitaj's intention in employing texts in this way? Certainly, the texts applied to his paintings of around 1960, such as *The Murder of Rosa Luxemburg*, do not necessarily elucidate the imagery. Having read the notes, we do not suddenly apprehend the meaning of the work. Conversely, Kitaj's paintings and prints always function *visually* first and foremost. It is the impact and atmosphere of the imagery which holds our attention, not the text. Furthermore, it is not unimportant that the text Kitaj applied to his canvas, the text made as part of the image, is fundamentally ambiguous and playful. How seriously are we expected to take the quasi-scholarship and the reticence inherent in the use of words and phrases such as 'resemblance', 'similar to', and 'looks like'?

From the very beginning of his career Kitaj employed tactics through which he aimed to keep the dialogue with his own work open. He made his position clear in an very

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<sup>209</sup> Saxl, *Lectures*, 355-6.



early text entitled, in full, *On Associating Texts, Paraphrases, Commentaries, Lists, Notes and Other Hand-Written Material With Paintings*.<sup>210</sup> In this text he argues

I would hope that the painter would be able to carry on his dialogue with his work along the lines under discussion after he ceased to be responsible for the keep of the work ..... in fact - - by (continuing) to associate peripheral material with a work after the work has left him - - he may be said to be still working on the painting .....<sup>211</sup>

I think then that these texts are intended as satellites to the work itself: they are part of and apart from what might be called the core work. Each influences the other, like the Moon orbiting the Earth. Read that way, they function in much the same fashion as the notes Eliot attached to *The Waste Land*. In *On Associating Texts*... Kitaj seems to suggest this himself. The key word here, I suggest, is ‘associating’ with its echoes of Breton’s definition of Surrealism as, amongst other things, ‘certain forms of association neglected before’.

More or less cogent selections [of text] may be introduced [...] into the work or the painter may care to associate these selections with a painting or with more than one work in a more difficult way.<sup>212</sup>

This implies a looser, more ambiguous connection between the painting and the text than commentators such as Lynch and Peters Corbett seem prepared to allow. This brings to mind the Lemuel story which Kitaj first associated with *The Murder of Rosa Luxemburg* before reallocating it to *Isaac Babel Riding with Budyonny*. It is also important to bear in mind that it is clear from *On Associating Texts*... that Kitaj did not consider the use of notes to be simply a form of appendix one could either take or leave. On the contrary

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<sup>210</sup> I am quoting from Kitaj’s typed draft manuscript in the Kitaj Papers. UCLA, Kitaj Papers, Collection 1741, box 119, folder 31. The text was first published in *The Cambridge Opinion*, January 1964, no. 37.

<sup>211</sup> Kitaj, *On Associating Texts*, unpaginated manuscript.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid.

If a title may be given to a work, a sub-title or a sequence of titles may be given; a set of notes may be given; an index and / or bibliography may be given; complex varieties of textual material may be introduced into the work (onto the painting) or otherwise 'given' - - ultimately or occasionally coalescing with the painted elements to the extent that they (the textual elements) can in no way be called peripheral.<sup>213</sup>

In both the Paris statement and the preface, on the other hand, Kitaj exhibits a greater tendency to make assertions than he did earlier. Having said that, by the time he came to write those later texts, there is a feeling that Kitaj did indeed exhibit a neurotic desire to control not just the reading of individual works but the trajectory of his entire oeuvre – hence his tendency to relegate the screenprints and many of his early paintings, and the almost complete disappearance of the installation *Lives of the Engineers*. Paradoxically, the aesthetic of Kitaj's work, visual and textual, especially in the 1960s, actively provokes multiple readings and dialogue. Kitaj clearly worried about the meaning of his works and about the difficulties of speaking clearly within a Modernist language which tended towards personal rather than public languages. For instance, in a letter to Robert Murdock, then curator of the Albright-Knox Gallery, Buffalo, concerning the canvas *Walter Lippmann*, Kitaj wrote: 'There is no, or very little question of, ultimate meanings, as, I think, issues of meaning are far less clear than is often supposed, even in simple, abstract art.' But he goes on to say

I wish this could be less the case, or, better yet – I would like to develop into a switch-hitter and divide my time among the very complex, the very fresh and simple, the clearer meaning, the very difficult ... and more ... but maybe we haven't come upon that ripe time yet.<sup>214</sup>

The tension between the urge to speak clearly, whilst simultaneously making art which is richly allusive, was identified as 'Kitaj's Fork' by the critic Norbert Lynton:

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<sup>213</sup> Kitaj, *On Associating Texts*, unpaginated manuscript.

<sup>214</sup> Boyle, *Dine Kitaj*, 13-14.

‘He wanted to be both polemical and obscure, public orator and private scholiast.’<sup>215</sup>

If one considers his use of texts over time, one thing is clear and that is that they are rarely if ever without ambiguity. The early Kitaj might quote a slab of Saxl or provide a book list as a means to elucidate his work but he does not provide a clear guide how to use this information. He leaves us to fathom the meaning rather as he does when quoting imagery in his painting. Even later, where the prefaces appear to transmit the direct language of the painter, various tactics are used that tend to render meaning slippery.

### *The Murder of Rosa Luxemburg and the Visualization of Murder*

Further within his Paris statement Kitaj makes the following observation:

Looking back, it doesn't seem to have been a bad idea at all to have looked around for some case to be put in a picture, some tableau or imaging which could represent the condition of fear and foreboding in which Jews had always lived in the Diaspora before Nazism, and which condition shows little sign of disappearing since the Holocaust.<sup>216</sup>

I am particularly interested in Kitaj's use of the word *tableau* here. It is an odd word to use. It brings the reader up short. The writing of the Paris statement coincided not only with his fullest engagement with Jewish themes but also with his interest in figure drawing and in the work of Degas. Indeed, his pastel drawing of the dying *Degas* dates to 1980. Against that background, his use of the word *tableau* in a statement about a painting called *The Murder of Rosa Luxemburg*, which is ‘really about murdering Jews’, takes on a peculiar resonance, bearing in mind Degas' own assessment of the act of painting:

<sup>215</sup> Norbert Lynton, ‘Kitaj's Fork’, in *Modern Painters*, April 1994, vol 7, no 3, 95.

<sup>216</sup> Kitaj, ‘The Murder of Rosa Luxemburg (1960-62)’ statement dated ‘Paris 1981’.

Un tableau est une chose qui exige autant de rouerie, de malice et de vice que le perpétration d'un crime.<sup>217</sup>

Leaving aside for one moment the reference to Neumeyer's *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* article, the details of Luxemburg's death have in themselves a curious Warburgian echo. The murderous beating and subsequent dumping of her body in the canal recalls the death of Orpheus, whose remains, having been torn to pieces by the Maenads, were thrown into the sea. Maenads were, for Aby Warburg, reminders of the Dionysian, orgiastic aspect of classical culture, which the neo-classicists of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries overlooked, and which he asseverated underpinned the 20<sup>th</sup> century European culture. As we have seen, this is the irrational behind or below the surface of the rational. Warburg wrote in his *Lecture on Serpent Ritual*:

In the orgiastic cult of Dionysus for example, the Maenads danced with live snakes entwining their hair like diadems, a snake in one hand and in the other the animal which was to be torn to pieces in the ecstatic sacrificial dance performed in honour of the god. The blood-sacrifice, carried out in a state of frenzied exaltation, is the culmination and real meaning of this religious dance...<sup>218</sup>

The blood-sacrifice, then – a death – is the 'real meaning'. Warburg, shifting his attention to the story of Laocöon, argues further: 'So the death of the father with his two sons becomes a symbol of the antique Passion; death as revenge wrought by demons without justice and without hope of salvation.'<sup>219</sup> In his canvas, Kitaj can be said to be foregrounding the dark Dionysian forces at the heart of European civilization in the early-20<sup>th</sup> century. Still, the fact remains that Luxemburg was a woman killed by men. And here it may be worth considering the relationship of

<sup>217</sup> 'A painting is something which requires as much cunning, malice and vice as a crime.' Edgar Degas in Paul André Lemoisne, *Degas et son oeuvre* (New York: Garland, 1984), 119. In Jake Auerbach's film *Kitaj: In the Picture*, Kitaj misquotes this, saying: 'I like what Degas said – he said that making a picture is like the perpetration of a crime.' Auerbach, *Kitaj: In the Picture*, timecode: 26' 27".

<sup>218</sup> Warburg, A, (trans. WF Mainland) 'A Lecture on Serpent Ritual', in *The Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, vol. 2, no. 4, (April 1939) 288.

<sup>219</sup> Warburg, *A Lecture on Serpent Ritual*, 288.

Kitaj's canvas to a sub-genre common in the art and literature of Germany both during and after the First World War, that of the *Lustmord*.

The word *Lustmord* is generally translated into English as sexual murder but the German word *Lust* (joy, desire, pleasure, zest, fancy, inclination, and as adjective, hedonistic) implies a more complex range of anarchic motives. George Grosz and Otto Dix, to name but two artists, both produced numerous images – drawings, watercolours, prints, as well as paintings – which graphically depict violence towards women.

The genre appears in contemporary German literature. The theme of the *Lustmord* runs through Alfred Döblin's novel *Berlin Alexanderplatz* (1929) like mould veins through cheese. The antihero Franz Biberkopf murders, rapes and brutalizes women throughout the book. Significantly, Döblin presented a fictionalised biography of Rosa Luxemburg in his novel *Karl und Rosa*, volume four of *November 1918: Eine deutsche Revolution*, written some twenty years after her death. In this work, as Maria Tatar has shown, Döblin, in his fictionalised account of Luxemburg's life, frames her murder in terms of her sexual desires. Her time in prison (the period covered by the *Letters* cited by Kitaj) is spent indulging in fantasies in which her deceased lover, Hannes Düsterburg, will be returned to life through their sexual union<sup>220</sup>. Later, the Devil, disguised as Hannes, seduces her and she willingly gives herself up to him. Furthermore, her empathy with the suffering of animals (which she frequently writes about in her prison letters) is linked to a female notion of self-sacrifice. Her enemies refer to her as 'bloody Rosa, the red sow' or a 'waddling duck' and, at the moment of her murder, she is presented as collapsing under the blows like animal in an

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<sup>220</sup> Maria Tatar. *Lustmord: Sexual Murder in Weimar Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 149.

abattoir<sup>221</sup>. It is by no means certain that Kitaj knew Döblin's work; in his references, he restricts himself to the historical-political context of the time. However, in focusing on the moment of her murder Kitaj reveals a degree of convergence, at least, with Döblin.

As the term *Lustmord* implies, most of these works dwell on the erotic nature of the crime and are problematic precisely because they emphasise the sexual attraction of the victim even as they dwell on her physical injuries. In George Grosz's *John, der Frauenmörder*, (*John, the Ladykiller*) of 1918 (fig. 24) for instance, the unfortunate woman is, typically, depicted nude and alluring, despite being dead. With her rosy breasts, full curves, and sexy boots, one could so easily overlook that her throat has been cut. Even in death, she remains desirable. Iconographically, she belongs to the long tradition of headless naked women in European art, which stretches back to the archaeological fragments of ancient Greece and Rome. Such a conflicted image, in which we are invited abhor the crime whilst admiring the physical charms of the victim, are not uncommon in this type of work. Heinrich Maria Davringhausen's *Der Lustmörder* (1917) (fig. 25) is essentially an odalisque, reminiscent of Manet's *Olympia*; only the eyes peering furtively from beneath the bed add a sinister note. Seeing a murder before the event in this way inculcates the viewer in the crime about to unfold and underlines the fundamentally voyeuristic nature of the *Lustmord* genre.

A more nuanced variation on this type of image was produced by Max Beckmann. *Das Martyrium*, sheet 4 of his print portfolio *Die Hölle*, made in 1919, the year of Luxemburg's death, represents her murder unequivocally in terms of the Christian

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<sup>221</sup> 'wie ein gefälltes Tier'. Ibid., 150. 'He swings the butt over his head and slams it down on her skull with such impact that it cracks, and like a slaughtered animal she falls to the ground with the butt.' Alfred Döblin (trans John E Woods), *Karl and Rosa: November 1918, A German Revolution* (New York: Fromm International Publishing Corporation, 1983), 490.

sacrifice, drawing on the canonical tradition of crucifixions and depositions.

Luxemburg, who is depicted disproportionately larger than the other figures, is splayed across the centre of the sheet as if about to be literally crucified, whilst the assassins assault her with rifle-butts and gleeful determination. Beckman's depiction of the murder using the Western canonical conventions of the crucifixion, is at some pains to emphasise the event as a Passion. And this in turn brings to mind Warburg's remarks, on the death of Laocöon, referred to earlier, that it is the symbol of the antique Passion.

For all its symbolic overtones, Beckmann's lithograph depicts events with some accuracy: it is clearly night-time; there is the canopied entrance to the Hotel Eden, where she had been held for 'questioning'; there the militia with their rifles; there the car about to drive the dying Luxemburg to the canal. The death shot is indicated by a figure (possibly inside the car, though it is not clear as the perspective is deliberately fractured) who points with his finger at her head – a gesture reminiscent of the disembodied, revolver-toting hand in Kitaj's painting.

Insofar as these works provide a precedent for *The Murder of Rosa Luxemburg* it is a distinctly historical one – they predate Kitaj by some forty years. There was little in the art of his contemporaries which came close to dealing so overtly with so a dark a historical theme. Having said that, there were some developments in another field which at least chime with Kitaj's subject even if they did not necessarily prompt it. For instance, despite his avowed lifelong fascination with film, Kitaj made few references to the work of Alfred Hitchcock. Possibly Hitchcock was not to his taste. Whatever his feelings, though, he surely knew of Hitchcock's work for, as Ríos has shown, the male figure at the centre of the 1966 canvas *Walter Lippmann* is based on a still showing Robert Donat in a scene from *The 39 Steps*. Hitchcock's *Psycho* was

released on 16 May 1960, which means it appeared around the time Kitaj was working on *The Murder of Rosa Luxemburg*. By a curious coincidence, this was the same year Michael Powell released *Peeping Tom* (fig. 26), another tale of sexual morbidity. I do not want to suggest that *The Murder of Rosa Luxemburg* was prompted by either of these films. What they do is provide a context for the depiction of violence against women at the time Kitaj was working on the canvas. And given his fascination with film it is hard to imagine that he was unaware of either. Indeed, Powell's work was an important early inspiration for Kitaj, as he readily acknowledged to Richard Morphet:

... movies like *The Red Shoes* gave me exactly the unreal melodrama of the artistic life in Europe I wanted it to be (and still do).<sup>222</sup>

I think there is a question here worth considering: why did Kitaj choose this subject at all? There is little precedence for it in the contemporary art of the time. One has to go back to the previously discussed *Lustmords* of Weimar Germany or the psychodramas of the Surrealists to find anything similar – Giacometti's *Woman with her Throat Cut* (1932), springs to mind. And when Kitaj came to depict other revolutionary figures, such as Durruti, who also met violent deaths, he chose not to show them *in extremis*.

The murders in both *Psycho* and *Peeping Tom* are performed with a knife, as they are in most depictions of the *Lustmord*. Which brings me back to the lines, or striations, in Kitaj's painting: it is hard not to describe them as *slashing* lines. Their function within the painting is to suggest violence without showing it (unlike, Beckmann emphatically does). However, perhaps inevitably, the performance of making them resembles stabbing, and not the beating that actually occurred. Kitaj acknowledge this

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<sup>222</sup> Morphet, *RB Kitaj: A Retrospective*, 44.



himself in the Preface he wrote to this canvas, when he invoked Kafka's *In der Strafkolonie* (*In the Penal Colony*):

Who could forget the machine he invented that inscribes the condemned man's sentence on his body with needles ... In my painting, Rosa is 'inscribed' by the pointed shapes...<sup>223</sup>

These lines, or 'pointed shapes', occupy the lower half of the canvas, immediately below the body of Luxemburg. They were obviously done swiftly, for the paintwork is broken and suggests the artist drew the brush down quickly across the canvas. There is a precedent for this in the work of Francis Bacon, who often employed similar slashing strokes to suggest various substances from grass and fabric, but Kitaj's marks do not *describe*, they just are. They certainly imply violence and their closest analogy is the trajectory lines cartoonists sometimes use to indicate the paths of bullets. This would certainly be appropriate for a murder picture, except Luxemburg was not executed by firing squad. She was battered, then shot once, as Kitaj both describes in the text and shows, using just such a trajectory line to trace the fatal shot from the pistol to Luxemburg's head. Actually, I do not think the lines mean anything except a violent assault on the victim: we can read them as bullets, blows or cuts as we think fit.

However, it is just possible that Kitaj's source for the lines came, once again from Saxl, whom we know Kitaj was reading at this time. In the published *Lectures* Saxl reproduces Velazquez's *Surrender of Breda*. This canvas prominently features the ranked pikes of the Spanish army, disposed in a manner which strongly recalls the lines in *The Murder of Rosa Luxemburg*. More significantly, a detail, focussing on the pikes isolated against the sky, appears on the preceding page as plate 222b (fig. 89). As it happens, the pikes are quite incidental to Saxl's intention for this detail but,

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<sup>223</sup> Morphet, *RB Kitaj: A Retrospective*, 82.

graphically, they dominate the image.<sup>224</sup> This may simply be coincidence but, if the pikes were the prompt for Kitaj's striations, it creates a further connection with Kafka's machine and with *Peeping Tom*, for the murder weapon in the Powell's film is a knife attached to the leg of his camera tripod – a makeshift pike, or needle, in other words. There is a broader issue here, too: I think that Kitaj scanned the *Lectures*, like the *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, for striking imagery, visual material that reverberated or formed associations for him. The use of details in both publications almost certainly influenced Kitaj's own use of details in his early catalogues and in Livingstone's monograph. (Indeed, Livingstone keeps faith with this practice even in the most recent edition, published in 2010, three years after Kitaj's death.) Details can have significantly different meanings when isolated from their context, as Kitaj understood from his immersion in Warburg and Saxl. Furthermore, to adapt the iconography of apotheosis to the death of a secular figure like Rosa Luxemburg is to attempt exactly the continuity of imagery that Warburg's *Mnemosyne Atlas* sought to illustrate.

If Kitaj's painting can be seen then as, in some sense, a late variant of the *Lustmord*, it is important to see how it differs from its progenitors. As I have already discussed, Luxemburg is presented in abjection, barely identifiable as human, let alone as a woman – there is certainly no hint of titillation, as there is, perhaps, in Grosz, for instance. It is also significant that there are two women, other than the victim, present in the painting and only one identifiably male figure, the driver of the car, and he is passive – he is not even looking at the body. The two women on the other hand are active: one mourns, one bears the body of Luxemburg. Arguably, there is of course a further female in the painting: the figure of Germania, who presides over events from

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<sup>224</sup> Saxl used this detail to draw attention to the accuracy of Velasquez's description of Breda. Saxl, *Lectures*, 317.

a distance. Importantly, I think, they perform a confrontational, witnessing role, facing both the driver and the assassin. Women as positive, active agents rarely occur in the *Lustmord* genre. Significantly, however, they do appear in both *Psycho* and *Peeping Tom*, and in later iterations of the ‘slasher’ movie, where they assume the role of ‘final girl’, who survives to confront the murderer and, as Nicholas Rogers argues, subverts the misogynistic subtext of the genre:

... the misogynistic thrust of slasher movies is undermined by the fact that the ‘final girl’ ultimately triumphs ... If women are the principal subjects of abject terror, rendered helpless before the killer’s gaze, they also lay that gaze to rest.<sup>225</sup>

If we accept Kitaj’s retrospective assessment of the painting, the killer is present in *Rosa Luxemburg*, of course, but only his hand bearing the murder weapon is visible; his features are obliterated by Kitaj’s note describing the murder. He is, in other words, literally *faced* with his crime. (Or, if we prefer a more Kafkaesque interpretation, he is inscribed with his crime.) Finally, the only figure to directly face the viewer is the corpse of Luxemburg herself. By directly engaging her gaze, the viewer is made to identify with both the killer’s acts and the victim, as Ian Christie suggests of *Peeping Tom*.<sup>226</sup>

### *The Murder of Rosa Luxemburg and The Eichmann Trial*

As we have seen, in his 1963 catalogue text, Kitaj refers to ‘The prophetic murder of the remarkable woman Harold Laski called one of the greatest Socialist thinkers of our time...’ It is hard not to conclude that the use of the phrase ‘prophetic murder’ is a reference to the Holocaust and, as we have seen, when he came to write the long statement on the canvas, some twenty years later, he makes his meaning much clearer.

<sup>225</sup> Nicholas Rogers, *Halloween: From Pagan Ritual to Party Night* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 118.

<sup>226</sup> Ian Christie, *Arrows of Desire: The Films of Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger* (London: Waterstone, 1985), 102.

But, even if this 1963 text was written closer in time to the painting of the picture, it is still retrospective. In the intervening two years a significant event had unfolded, which had considerable bearing on Kitaj's subsequent development. This was, of course, the arrest and trial of Adolf Eichmann, to which Kitaj alludes in the text quoted earlier. Eichmann had, in fact been kidnapped by Mossad agents in Buenos Aires on 11<sup>th</sup> May 1960, and whisked out of Argentina to Israel, where Prime Minister David Ben Gurion announced the capture to the Knesset on 22<sup>nd</sup> May. Following a widely publicized trial, which drew the details of the Holocaust to international attention, Eichmann was hanged on 1<sup>st</sup> June 1962. It was to this event, and Hannah Arendt's reporting of the trial, that Kitaj credited his interest in Jewish history. The arrest and subsequent trial of Eichmann dragged the Holocaust, a subject the world had largely sublimated over the previous fifteen years, back into the public consciousness. Indeed, as Kitaj acknowledged, at least part of Ben Gurion's aim was not only to oblige the Gentile world to acknowledge the Holocaust but, as Hannah Arendt wrote, to provide

... a lesson for those inside Israel too: 'the generation of Israeli's who have grown up since the holocaust' were in danger of losing their ties with the Jewish people and, by implication, with their own history. 'It is necessary that our youth remember what happened to the Jewish people. We want them to know the tragic facts of their history.'<sup>227</sup>

It was this lesson, it seems, that prompted Kitaj's increasing engagement with his own Jewish identity and with 'the tragic facts' of Jewish history. Whereas this was to have profound implications for his subsequent work, we cannot know if *The Murder of Rosa Luxemburg* canvas was begun before or after Eichmann was apprehended. Kitaj's own statement is ambiguous on this point.

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<sup>227</sup> Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (London: Faber & Faber, 1963), 8-9.

And so, before the idea of the Banality of Evil became current and controversial (Arendt's Eichmann), I sought to cast my theme in a representation of thugs doing their thing'

On this point, one is inclined to wonder if his re-dating the painting to '1960-62' is an intentional blurring to tie the work more closely to the Eichmann trial. It is worth remembering also, as John Lynch emphasises, that the text attached to the painting (ie the only text we can safely say reflects Kitaj's terms of reference whilst at work on it) makes allusions not to the persecution of Jews but to Luxemburg's politics.

Furthermore, Luxemburg's death is pictured against a backdrop of the Romantic idealism from which the German Empire emerged. On the other hand, all of these references draw attention to a set of circumstances that would, ultimately, deteriorate into Nazism. And, although Kitaj may have openly revealed some of his references we cannot rule out his keeping others well hidden.

John Lynch has discussed Kitaj's use of text to, in some respects, narrow the range of responses to his imagery, a manifestation of an anxiety to maintain control. This is particularly true of the preface with which, as Lynch points out, Kitaj effectively tries to restrict the meaning of the painting. As we have seen, *The Murder of Rosa Luxemburg* is a complex, richly allusive work, capable of multiple readings. At the same time, Kitaj's notes on the surface of the work make reference to the political circumstances. The preface, on the other hand, proposes a single meaning, that the painting is a metaphor for the persecution of Jews. 'It is about an historic murder but it is really about murdering Jews', writes Kitaj. This, however, as Lynch points out is problematic precisely because it denies the very specific references he pinned to his canvas back in 1960.<sup>228</sup> Furthermore, neither these references nor the imagery of the painting suggest Jewish themes. The terms of reference are firmly historical-political.

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<sup>228</sup> Lynch, *Critical Kitaj*, 67.

Even the veiled reference to the Holocaust in the catalogue entry – ‘the prophetic murder’ – was written two years after the painting was completed. I think when Kitaj tries to make Luxemburg’s fate ‘prophetic’ of or, in some sense, stand for the Holocaust, he is falling into a trap many fall into, which is to view the past through the distorting lens of hindsight, as when people make Kafka’s work ‘predict’ the Holocaust. During Luxemburg’s lifetime, Jews were being persecuted in Russia, as Isaac Babel’s *Red Cavalry* stories graphically portray. Indeed, as Kitaj himself makes clear in his writings, it was due to the Russian Pogroms that his grandparents fled to the USA. But such persecution was not the case in Germany, despite late-19<sup>th</sup> century debates about anti-semitism. Indeed, as the Oxford-based Germanist, Ritchie Robertson points out, the German Empire did not persecute Jews, certainly not in the way it did Roman Catholics in the mid-1870s, and Socialists from 1878 to 1890.<sup>229</sup> Sociologist Zygmunt Bauman too emphasises the relative indulgence shown to Jews in Germany prior to the Nazi state.

Thanks to the thorough historical research conducted over the last decades, we know now that before the Nazi ascent to power, and long after the entrenchment of the rule over Germany, German popular anti-Semitism came a poor second to Jew-hatred in quite a few other European countries. Long before the Weimar Republic put the finishing touches to the long process of Jewish emancipation, Germany was widely conceived by international Jewry as the haven of religious and national and tolerance.<sup>230</sup>

Luxemburg was imprisoned and ultimately killed for her political ideas and the perceived threat they represented to the Weimar government and not, as Kitaj seems to suggest, because she was Jewish. Furthermore, the painting fits in with other works Kitaj made in the early 1960s, which mediate on Socialist/Anarchist history between the two World Wars, other obvious examples being *Red Banquet*, also of

<sup>229</sup> Ritchie Robertson, *The 'Jewish Question' in German Literature, 1749-1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 3.

<sup>230</sup> Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), 31.

1960, and *Kennst du das Land* and *Junta*, both of 1962. The painting is a memorial but not simply to Luxemburg. Luxemburg's death was an episode in the collapse of the German Empire. The painting then, perhaps, commemorates the failure of a culture.

### Conclusion

This canvas is concerned broad questions of conflict within Europe, of which German history is one example. The evidence of the imagery and the references suggests the disintegration of this culture. Furthermore, Kitaj's inclusion of his grandmothers creates a biographical link to violent events in Europe in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century – in Russia and its neighbouring states, this time – events that formed his own American family. The painting does not memorialise or indeed apotheosise Rosa Luxemburg in any conventional sense, regardless of its sources. Rather, it perhaps questions the purpose of such conventional responses. Kitaj's Rosa is an abject figure, like the creatures in the near contemporary paintings of Baselitz and Schoenebeck, very far removed from cultural icons such as Warhol's *Mao*.

The densely complex web of associations both aid and hinder a straightforward reading of this painting. Despite Kitaj's later attempts to fix its meaning as being 'really about murdering Jews', *The Murder of Rosa Luxemburg* feels essentially reflexive, questioning itself and the language from which it is constructed.

Furthermore, if the imagery suggests any one particular reading over others, it is that of the speed and ease with which dark, irrational forces can break through the most apparently rational situations. From this pessimistic viewpoint one may say, perhaps, that for Kitaj, as for Dix and Grosz forty years earlier, sexual violence, racial violence, and war are all manifestations of the same innate aggression and unresolved

conflicts within human nature. Ultimately, I think, *The Murder of Rosa Luxemburg* is a deeply ambivalent work about the deeply ambivalent currents which course through what we like to think of as rational, civilised society.



### Chapter 3

#### HIS CULT OF THE FRAGMENT

The 1960s saw arguably the last great wave of printmaking of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. By this I mean that printmaking became, for a time, as significant a platform for new ideas in the visual arts as painting or sculpture. Many leading artists, especially younger ones, were making prints which, technically and intellectually, were equivalent and even superior to their output in other media. Richard Hamilton, Peter Blake, Eduardo Paolozzi, David Hockney, Andy Warhol, Jim Dine, and RB Kitaj, to name but a few, all breathed fresh life into the graphic arts during this period.

This outpouring of graphics coincided with the emergence of screen-printing as an artistic medium and most, if not all, of the artists mentioned above tried their hand at it. And it was, perhaps, Kitaj who pushed the medium to its limits, producing along the way some of the most imaginative prints of the decade. They certainly show him at his most formally and technically inventive, and rank amongst his most compelling achievements in any medium. Indeed, it seems as if in the 1960s printmaking overtook painting to become the most important outlet for his imagination.

Kitaj was an intermittent yet lifelong printmaker. His earliest surviving print, the etched *Portrait of Mrs Bacher*, dates from 1952.<sup>231</sup> A further group of etchings, including landscapes of *Fontainebleu* and *Oxford*, as well as two portraits of his stepfather, Walter Kitaj, dates from 1958, the year he started at the Oxford

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<sup>231</sup> Bloomsbury Auctions, *Modern & Contemporary Prints*, Thursday 25th June 2009. Lot 568. Ronald Brooks Kitaj (1932-2007) *Portrait of Mrs. Bacher* the rare, probably unique etching, 1952, inscribed To Mrs. Bacher with Love Ronnie Kitaj Vienna MCMLII in brown ink, on wove paper, with full margins, in good condition apart from slight mount-staining, sheet 250 x 175mm. See <http://www.bloomsburyauctions.com/detail/686/568.0> and <http://www.bloomsburyauctions.com/auction/686/20/29> accessed 2.3.2013. Kitaj refers to a 'Hedwig Bauer' in his preface to *Self-portrait as a Woman*. See Morphet, *RB Kitaj: A Retrospective*, 144.

University's Ruskin School of Drawing. Towards the end of his life, he utilised lithography for a number of self-portraits and returned to intaglio techniques with etchings of his mother and a series of *Biblical Portraits*. However, if he is known at all for his printmaking, it is for the screenprints he made in collaboration with Chris Prater of Kelpra Studio over a fifteen-year period, from 1963 to 1978, and with greatest intensity between 1966 and 1971. Yet, for the artist himself, in his later years at least, this body of work largely ceased to exist. As far as he was concerned they were to be considered 'youthful folly', despite the fact that the 'youth' in question was thirty-two when he began them and forty-six by the time he finished.<sup>232</sup> He went even further, in conversation with Julián Ríos, saying: 'I regret my collage period deeply. Thank God it did not last too long.'<sup>233</sup>

Neither Ríos nor any other interviewer appears to have thought to ask him what this antipathy was about. Or, if they did, the answer hasn't been published. It should be noted, though, that in his texts for Jane Kinsman's catalogue raisonné his attitude to some, if not all, of these prints seemed to soften. For instance, musing on one of his last collaborations with Prater, the striking *The Red Dancer of Moscow* of 1975 (fig. 90), Kitaj wrote:

One of my favourite collage prints and one of the last, it's like a building in some idealized European street where you can look into the windows and doorways.<sup>234</sup>

This chapter looks at the genesis of Kitaj's screenprints and considers his working relationship with Chris Prater, at whose premises, Kelpra Studio, the prints were made. It also considers the themes which recur throughout his Kelpra works. In

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<sup>232</sup> Rosemary Miles, *Kitaj: A Print Retrospective* (London: Victoria & Albert Museum, 1994), unpaginated.

<sup>233</sup> Ríos, *Kitaj: Pictures and Conversations*, 64.

<sup>234</sup> Kitaj, afterword to *The Red Dancer of Moscow*, in Jane Kinsman, *The Prints of RB Kitaj* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1994), 108.

particular, it analyses Kitaj's first screenprint, *Acheson Go Home* of 1963, his first major print series, *Mahler Becomes Politics*, *Beisbol* made between 1964 and 1967, and the series *Struggle in the West: The Bombing of London*, made in 1969. These prints reveal Kitaj's interest in modern European history, a concern with the role of the intellectual within society, and a developing interest in Jewish themes.

During the late-1960s, when his printmaking was at its most intense, the artist was based for long stretches in California, or other parts of the USA, and, therefore, many of the images, including some of the most complex, were developed by post across the Atlantic. In other words, they were not the result of a modernist artist-printmaker approach but a truly modern enterprise made possible every bit as much by the jet engine and airmail as by the then relatively new medium of serigraphy. Indeed, the jet age, and high-speed intercontinental travel effectively began the same year he entered the Ruskin, in 1958 when Boeing unveiled the 707, which dominated commercial jet flight throughout the 1960s. Kitaj would have an even more significant involvement with aviation towards the end of the Sixties, when, as part of Los Angeles County Museum of Art's Art & Technology program, he undertook a placement at another aero-industry giant, Lockheed.

Chris Prater described their working procedure in an article for *Studio International*

A Kitaj print we are about to start working on arrived from California by mail as a page of instructions, a small pencil sketch, and about twenty photographs from newspapers and magazines. The first proof is the beginning on which we and Kitaj start working.<sup>235</sup>

Fortunately, a significant part of this correspondence has survived in an archive at Pallant House Art Gallery in Sussex, allowing us a remarkable insight into Kitaj's

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<sup>235</sup> Chris Prater, 'Experiments in Screenprinting' in *Studio International*, 174, (895), (December 1967), 293. See also Kinsman, *The Prints of RB Kitaj*, 49.

working methods and concerns.<sup>236</sup> Although in many ways a very open or, at least, vocal artist, he preferred to keep this nitty-gritty nuts-and-bolts side of his work hidden. One of the notes to Prater to discusses what seems like a proposal to publish the development of a print. Kitaj writes:

We agreed to try and follow the Pound print thru from A to Z in his catalog – so I hope you can keep all the sources, originals, different proof states etc. But I don't want to publish those hand-written letters & sketches (like this one) – you know me!<sup>237</sup>

Kitaj was introduced to screenprinting when asked to contribute to the ICA Screenprint Project, which came to fruition in 1964. The idea was for leading contemporary artists to produce new work in the medium for an exhibition at the ICA. His contribution to this scheme was *Good God Where is the King?* (fig. 27) a somewhat austere collage of text and photographs. In terms of the chronology of Kitaj's prints, however, it seems not to be the first. Chris Prater's daybook has *Acheson Go Home* at the top of the list, probably because Kitaj worked on several ideas simultaneously. Regardless of which one actually came first, he was producing highly accomplished prints (both iconographically and technically) from the word go. To really understand what this means, we need to compare it with the paintings he was making at the same time. In 1962, his output included such diverse works as *Kennst du das Land?* and *Good News for Incunabulists* (fig. 28). The following year, the year he started the screenprints, saw the production of *Tedeum* and *Randolph Bourne in Irving Place*. Kitaj's early paintings show evidence of a rapidly evolving approach to picture making (almost from canvas to canvas). It is as if the ideas were there but the best way in which to express them had not quite been settled upon. Or

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<sup>236</sup> I am grateful to Marco Livingstone for bringing this material to my attention.

<sup>237</sup> Pallant House, Letter 68. Obviously, Kitaj changed his mind for some of these drawings and letters were published by Pat Gilmour in 'R.B. Kitaj and Chris Prater', *Print Quarterly*, vol.XI, no.2, June 1994, 117-150. This article was subsequently republished in Aulich & Lynch, *Critical Kitaj*, 82-110.

perhaps each new set of ideas prompted a fresh approach. In any case, as far as painting is concerned, the early 1960s were a period of stylistic flux, so the certainty with which he attacked printmaking is, therefore, somewhat surprising. What is less surprising is that the manner of the prints began to seep back into the paintings, which become more precise, the surfaces dryer, less painterly, chromatically bolder, in some ways more Pop – consider that both *Dismantling the Red Tent* (fig. 29) and *The Ohio Gang* (fig. 30) date from 1964 and the nature of the change becomes clear.

The brochure produced by the ICA to accompany the portfolio asserts that screenprinting is ‘essentially a painter’s vehicle’, which is odd given the medium’s smooth, gestureless surfaces. Presumably, they meant that its flatness makes it more appropriate to painters than sculptors. Where screenprinting really come into its own is as a vehicle for montage, and this is especially true of photo-screenprinting, such as Kitaj and Prater employed. This made it particularly exiting to younger artists but extremely suspect to the older generation. It is clear from his correspondence with Prater that that Kitaj understood the significance of what he was doing, sending up the old guard, as Pat Gilmour has noted, by signing some of the letters ‘Stanley Hayter’ and ‘M. Rothenstein’.<sup>238</sup> Screenprinting was a contentious topic within artistic debate during the early 1960s. Michael Rothenstein, a respected printmaker and brother of the director of the Tate Gallery, although broadly sympathetic to the artists using the new medium, nevertheless had some issues with the impersonal, gestureless quality of screenprinting, and went so far as to publish an article on both sides of the Atlantic entitled *Look! No Hands*. The situation was even more hostile in the USA. John Binyon Kahn’s *What is an Original Print* published by the Print Council of America in 1961 sold 55,000 copies within four years. The PCA defined originality thus:

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<sup>238</sup> Gilmour, *Print Quarterly*, 121-122.

The artist alone has created the master image in or upon the plate, stone, woodblock or other material for the purpose of creating the print.<sup>239</sup>

Ironically, it was precisely this distance between artist and final image which seems to have troubled Kitaj when looking back on this period in later years. Still, apart from the sly in-jokes with Prater, Kitaj poked fun at this Ludditism more publicly in the print *The Defects of its Qualities* (fig. 31) of 1967, which included the cover of Kahn's book alongside images of Picasso, a masked surgeon, a prostitute's registration papers and a fragment of text on Braque headlined 'Great French Innovator has Evolved a Serene Modern Art of his Own'. With this print Kitaj won first prize at the 1968-69 British Print Biennale, in Bradford, a decisive riposte to any detractors.<sup>240</sup>

Of course, screenprinting was not just of interest to pure printmakers. It also played a role in contemporary painting, particularly Pop art. In America, artists such as Andy Warhol and Robert Rauschenberg also combined screenprint and paint on canvas – the latter as early as 1962. For both these artists the beauty of serigraphy was precisely in its impersonality, partly in reaction to the macho, quasi-shamanistic posturings of the Abstract Expressionists. This attitude was shared by Kitaj who, as late as 1981, was expressing doubts about gestural paintwork for, although it 'can be wonderful ... it has also become a token, an amulet for the me generation of expressionists'.<sup>241</sup> The medium lent itself perfectly to someone like Warhol, whose entire aesthetic was based on the idea of disengagement, and who was prone to making statements such as 'I think somebody should be able to do all my paintings

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<sup>239</sup> Gilmour, *Print Quarterly*, 122.

<sup>240</sup> Ibid., 119.

<sup>241</sup> Kitaj in Shannon, *Kitaj: Paintings: Drawings and Pastels*, 43.

for me'.<sup>242</sup> Kitaj never went that far but in his screenprints he came surprisingly close, as we shall see.

Where there was tentative convergence with his fellow Americans was in his interest in combining screenprint and paint. Towards the end of a letter discussing a sheet for the series *Struggle in the West*, Kitaj asks Prater for the following:

Another request: when you print the two new editions – can you please print one of each on CANVAS as an experiment so I can see what it looks like – you can slice the canvas sheets accurately to the same size as the editions on the paper.<sup>243</sup>

It is impossible to say whether this idea simply came out of working, was directly suggested by a third party, or was influenced by another artist's practice. What is interesting is that, at around this time the painter Michael Andrews was also under contract to the Marlborough Gallery and under some pressure to try printmaking. Indeed, he began working on some ideas with Chris Prater, although these came to nothing in the end. At some point, he must have discussed the situation with Francis Bacon who suggested 'screen dp (diapositive) and paint on top of that.'<sup>244</sup> Possibly, the insatiably curious Bacon got this idea from looking at Warhol or Rauschenberg. Although Andrews did not make any editioned prints he did get as far as some trial proofs, which look intriguingly like Kitaj-Rauschenberg hybrids (fig. 32) and, according to William Feaver, one of his ideas was to employ 'prologue' flaps, a device Kitaj would later employ in the portfolio *The Struggle in the West*.<sup>245</sup>

However, Andrews did follow up Bacon's advice for he produced two large paintings,

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<sup>242</sup> Andy Warhol, interviewed by G.R. Swenson. Retrieved 14/02/2011, from <http://www.guggenheim.org/new-york/collections/collection-online/show-full/piece/?search=Andy>

<sup>243</sup> RB Kitaj, letter to Chris Prater postmarked 18.8.1967. Pallant House, Kitaj Archive, Letter 18.

<sup>244</sup> William Feaver, *Michael Andrews: Lights* (Madrid: Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, 2000), 23.

<sup>245</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

the triptych *Good and Bad at Games* (1964-8) and *The Lord Mayor's Reception in Norwich Castle Keep on the eve of the installation of the first Chancellor of the University of East Anglia* (1966-9) both of which employ oil paint and screenprinting on canvas. Given the close relationships between the School of London artists (and Kitaj had known them all from 1963) it is reasonable to assume that he was aware of these experiments in mixed media. In the event, only two finished paintings seem to have resulted from Kitaj's own this forays in this direction, the canvases *Things to Come*, 1965-70 and *On A Regicide Peace*, 1970. The initiation date of the former places it firmly within the period Andrews was combining screenprint with paint, although the results are very different.

Kitaj's commitment to printmaking and, indeed, Kelpira is nowhere better exemplified than in his decision to continue making them with Prater despite moving back to the States, where there must surely have been handier opportunities for collaboration. Obviously, the rapport he had with the printmaker and the knowledge that they were truly the *avant garde* was what counted. As he was later to admit '[Prater] was *the* master of his skill in the world'.<sup>246</sup> This must have been apparent to others, too, for, in one letter sent from California, Kitaj floats the possibility of one of his students coming to London 'to work for/with you to learn the craft'.<sup>247</sup> And, in another, he casually drops in the following:

Oh – I must also mention that the University has given me a small “research grant” to introduce one of the other professors here to your methods.<sup>248</sup>  
(Kitaj's emphasis)

Some letters give an idea of the speed and regularity of correspondence between the two. The example quoted above, concerning a possible student placement with

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<sup>246</sup> Kinsman, *The Prints of RB Kitaj*, 15.

<sup>247</sup> Kitaj, letter to Chris Prater, undated (but c.1968). Pallant House, Kitaj Archive, letter 12.

<sup>248</sup> Kitaj, letter to Chris Prater, undated. Pallant House, Kitaj Archive, letter 44.



Kelpra, starts with the informal abruptness of an e-mail: ‘Dear Chris – Yes, do a mat if you think it should have one...’<sup>249</sup> The symbiotic nature of the collaboration and the degree of trust is made explicit in an undated letter concerning the print *Ctric News Topi* which Kitaj wraps up with the following paragraph:

I’m sure this thick original collage will get nearly ruined in the roll but iron it out and *use your own judgement* if anything needs doing – or else incorporate any accidents.<sup>250</sup> (The italics are mine.)

### The Structure of the Screenprints

Almost all of Kitaj’s screenprints, no matter how chaotic they might seem, are based upon an underlying geometric grid structure, which is occasionally reinforced or echoed by an emphatic black grid (occasionally some other colour was used) superimposed over all or part of the imagery, as is the case with *Ctric News Topi* (fig. 33) and *Bacon II* both of 1968. The exceptions to this are a small number of early single-figure sheets, such as *Yaller Bird* (fig. 34) and *Disciple of Bernstein and Kautsky*, and the series *In Our Time, Covers From a Library*. Furthermore, squares, rectangles, parallelograms, tilted planes and other geometric figures occur throughout these works. Grids appear in Kitaj’s work as early as 1958 in canvases such as *Tarot Variations* and *Erasmus Variations*. Little has been said about Kitaj’s use of geometric abstraction within his work. As previously discussed, the artist himself, when writing about *Specimen Musings of a Democrat*, suggested that the diagrams of Ramon Lull inspired his composition.

Kitaj may have found a further possible example for this approach in Rabbinical *midrash*, tabulated commentaries on Biblical Torah texts. When printed, *midrashim*

<sup>249</sup> Kitaj, Pallant House, Kitaj Archive, letter 44.

<sup>250</sup> Kitaj, letter to Chris Prater, undated but c.1967. Pallant House, Kitaj Archive, letter 6.

take the form of a series of text blocks, which constitute the exegesis, distributed around a central text block, which is the scripture under analysis (fig. 35). With this in mind, one might tentatively propose a reading of *The Murder of Rosa Luxemburg* as a central image commented, or reflected upon by the images distributed around it. And one of Kitaj's very earliest Kelpra prints *Good God Where is the King*, with its blocks of text, bears a close resemblance to *midrash*.<sup>251</sup> However, seductive though this line of reasoning may be, the fact is that Kitaj maintained that, in the early 1960s, he had little practical knowledge of Judaism. This does not, of course, preclude the possibility that he had seen examples of *midrash*. And Jewish subjects were beginning to emerge in the artist's work even in the early 1960s, long before he began to acknowledge his Jewishness or openly deal with this theme.

Regardless of Ramon Lull or indeed *midrash*, it seems unlikely that after fifty years or so of modernist geometric abstraction, of which he was well aware, the idea of using geometric grids occurred to Kitaj after perusing the *Warburg Journals* in the late-1950s. He was, after all, a self-acknowledged lifelong fan of Mondrian, and a photograph of the Los Angeles studio after his death shows half a dozen reproductions of the Dutch painter's work of all periods, including the American paintings like *Broadway Boogie-Woogie*, tacked to the walls (fig. 36).<sup>252</sup> And, in an interview with Pat Gilmour, Chris Prater readily admits that the use of black grids was an allusion to Mondrian.<sup>253</sup> Kitaj, of course, frequently referred to his admiration for Mondrian in interviews. Indeed, in the last long interview he gave, published in

<sup>251</sup> I am grateful to Stephen Finer for bringing to my attention the similarity between Kitaj's early work and *midrash*.

<sup>252</sup> Amy Cappellazzo, et al, *The Collection of R.B. Kitaj* (London: Christie's, 2008), sale catalogue, 7 Feb 2008, 8.

<sup>253</sup> Chris Prater interviewed by Pat Gilmour, 6.4.1976. Partially transcribed interview, Tate Archive, TAV 51 AB.

Andrew Lambirth's *Kitaj* of 2004, he was asked if Francis Bacon was an inspiration, to which he replied

Yes! But the Wicked Witch of Reece Mews, and his art have faded from my world. At 70, I prefer Mondrian...<sup>254</sup>

Many incunabula and other early printed books (in addition to the art of Ramon Lull) contain often highly complex diagrams juxtaposing mathematical figures, geometry and figuration to explore occult ideas and these have a bearing on the development of Modernist abstraction, including Mondrian, either directly, as visual sources, or indirectly, through the writings of Madame Blavatsky (1831-1891) and other early-20<sup>th</sup> century Theosophists. Mondrian's interest in creating pictorial equivalents for spiritual equilibrium, for instance, was influenced by the Theosophists' search for divine order. Kitaj 'read Mondrian's *Plastic Art and Pure Plastic Art* when I was eighteen years old in NY'.<sup>255</sup> One of his closest lifelong friends, the poet Robert Duncan, was brought up as a Theosophist and maintained a strong interest in the occult throughout his life. What seems likely is that Lull's diagrams, with their fusion of occult imagery and geometry, suggested a way for Kitaj to combine his interest in abstraction with his devotion to figuration and to surrealism. After all, he says it was 'the crypto-surrealist look' of Lull's art that inspired his own work. And, indeed, he employs grids as frameworks into which he can drop images, leaving them to vibrate against one another, creating harmonies and dissonances. A particularly good example of this appears in the screenprint *Star Betelgeuse* of 1967 (fig. 37), a portrait of Robert Duncan from the series, *Some Poets*. The image of the hand holding the stone at lower left, I suggest, could be read – and especially so in this particular

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<sup>254</sup> Lambirth, *Kitaj*, 98.

<sup>255</sup> Morphet, *RB Kitaj: A Retrospective*, 47.

context – as a reference to line 7 of Ezra Pound’s *Canto VI*, ‘The stone is alive in my hand’. Pound’s significance for Kitaj (‘my favourite anti-Semite’) is well known.<sup>256</sup> Equally, Pound’s poetic practice was crucial for Duncan and, indeed, for Jonathan Williams, Robert Creeley, and other Black Mountain School poets, many of whom were close to Kitaj at this point. The inclusion of this image is thus an elegant nod both to his own, and Duncan’s, artistic lineage. And Duncan could almost be describing a quality of Kitaj’s work when he quotes from Pound’s definition of *phanopoeia*:

... “that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time” ...<sup>257</sup>

Pound and Duncan were describing a quality of Imagist verse but the concept of ‘an intellectual and emotional complex’ seems especially apposite to Kitaj’s paintings and prints.

This in some respects relates to the artist’s own position with regards to Modernism. ‘I want to address my modernist colleagues in this respect’, he told Jane Livingstone, ‘Modernism is dear to me’.<sup>258</sup> Even as late as 2004 he was describing himself as a ‘Symbolist-Surrealist-Diasporist Bastard of Modernism’.<sup>259</sup> And writing specifically about his screenprinting exploits Kitaj had this to say

Working with Chris, doing those prints, has been where I committed many of my own acts of modernism. My own closest adumbrations of the modernist spirit.<sup>260</sup>

<sup>256</sup> RB Kitaj, preface to *Cecil Court, London WC2 (The Refugees)* in Morphet, *RB Kitaj: A Retrospective*, 138.

<sup>257</sup> Robert Duncan, (eds. M Boughn and V Coleman), *The HD Book* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 313.

<sup>258</sup> Jane Livingstone, ‘R.B. Kitaj in the Larger Picture’ in Shannon, *Kitaj: Paintings, Drawings, Pastels*, 40.

<sup>259</sup> Lambirth, *Kitaj*, 108.

<sup>260</sup> Kitaj, ‘Chris – A Note Apropos’ in *Arts Review*, vol. 29, no.16, 5 August 1977.

Viewed in this light, his early work can be seen as both a homage to and critique of Modernism. Consider the juxtaposition of an image of Rasputin with Malevichesque Suprematist abstraction, a photograph of a bog man and railway lines in *World Ruin Through Black Magic* of 1963 (fig. 38). How are we to interpret this print? One possible reading would see it as an attempt to collide the idealistic, brave new world of Modernism with the brutal reality which was, arguably, an intrinsic part of it, and which Modernists such as Malevich, Rodchenko and Mondrian wished to expunge from art. To put it another way, if Malevich's aim was to create an art freed from the dead weight of the world, then Kitaj's, on the contrary, was to try to cram the world back in.

### Acheson Go Home

*Acheson Go Home* (fig. 39) has some claim to being Kitaj's first screenprint. It was published in 1963, according to Chris Prater's day books, the invoice being sent on 19<sup>th</sup> March 1964.<sup>261</sup> By any standards this image is an assured piece of work for a first attempt, and it sets the stage for the work to come. In fact, first in a case like this is hard to pin down accurately for, as Kinsman points out, the early prints were all based on pre-made collages (fig. 40) and their order of printing has more to do with the two men's timetables than sequence of composition.<sup>262</sup> Kitaj was already making collages in the early 1960s and some, such as *A History of Polish Literature*, of 1962, and *Work in Progress* (a collaboration with Paolozzi and as much an assemblage as a collage) also of 1962, were included in his first Marlborough show, *Pictures with Commentary, Pictures without Commentary*.

<sup>261</sup> Chris Prater's Daybook. Tate Archive TGA862/2.

<sup>262</sup> Kinsman, *The Prints of RB Kitaj*, 23, footnote 8.

The image is typically organised in a loose geometric grid, as are most of the screenprints. Within this framework, are arranged a series of apparently unrelated photographs, patterns, textures and texts. If we move around the grid from register to register, left to right, top to bottom, the first image is a photograph entitled Commissioner Connor, torn from a book or magazine. The Commissioner in question is Theophilus Eugene ‘Bull’ Connor (1897-1973) Commissioner for Public Safety in Birmingham, Alabama, and a well-known segregationist. His tactics to subdue African-American civil rights demonstrations in May 1963 (the year of this print) included the use of police dogs and high-pressure fire hoses, press images of which threw a spotlight on the circumstances of black Americans in segregated states and fuelled support for the Civil Rights Act passed into law on July 2<sup>nd</sup> 1964.<sup>263</sup>

Occupying the middle of the top register is a scrap of German language newsprint, from which the print derives its title.

ACHESON  
GO HOME  
Aus unserem Blut werdet ihr keine Dollar machen!  
Es lebe ein unabhängiges Oesterreich!  
Verleger und für den Inhalt verantwortlich Otto Jirik Wien X Nellreichgasse  
105. – Druck: Globus, Wien 1<sup>264</sup>

This anti-Marshall Plan propaganda Kitaj apparently found in the street whilst studying in Vienna.<sup>265</sup> To the right of this is a photo of Kitaj’s son, Lem, probably in the back garden of the family’s Dulwich home. On the second row, immediately below the Acheson text, and forming the centre of the image, is a small grid of twelve squares containing examples of intaglio printmaking marks which provides an ironic

<sup>263</sup> <http://www.alabamamoments.alabama.gov/sec.62.html> retrieved 11.01.2011. Andy Warhol’s painting and screenprint, *Birmingham Race Riot*, of 1964 also refers to these events.

<sup>264</sup> ‘Acheson Go Home! You won’t make any dollars from our blood! An independent Austria lives!’ Followed by the publication details.

<sup>265</sup> Gilmour, *Print Quarterly*, 127.

juxtaposition of traditional and contemporary print media. Formally, this echoes, or provides a clue to the overall structure of the print, which is also, very loosely, a twelve-square grid. Placed to the right of the central grid is a torn dust jacket photograph of the German playwright and poet, Gerhart Hauptmann (1862-1946). Underneath the central grid of printmarks is a red splash or stain, resembling blood, which chimes visually with the German text quoted above. On the left of the stain is a photograph of Kitaj himself standing in a small sailing-boat. In the centre of the bottom register is Edward Steichen's 1921 photograph *Isadora Duncan at the Portal of the Parthenon*. Lem appears again, wearing some kind of party hat, in the bottom right corner.

The significance of the Steichen photograph, I suggest, is Duncan's interest in the ritual, sacred roots of dance. As I have already discussed, Kitaj was deeply immersed in the work of Aby Warburg and the Warburg scholars at this time. They, too, were concerned with the ritualistic pagan roots of European culture. It may, therefore, be appropriate to read Duncan as an allusion to this branch of art historical research. Given Warburg's fascination with the frenzied gestures of the Maenad, Kitaj may have intended Duncan, whose dance technique was based on natural movement and, by the standards of the time, was free and 'uninhibited', to obliquely suggest the figure of the Maenad.<sup>266</sup> And, it should not be forgotten that she was, like Hawthorne, like Pound, like Eliot and like Kitaj, an America who lived for many years in Europe.

Similarly, the inclusion of Hauptmann is interesting. Of course, it would not be the last time that Kitaj introduced a major intellectual figure into his work. When discussing this print, Rosemary Miles simply refers to 'a German language book

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<sup>266</sup> James Aulich and John Lynch also draw attention to the link between Aby Warburg and Isadora Duncan. They do not, though, discuss *Acheson Go Home* and consequently miss the significance of Steichen's photograph for Kitaj's print. See Aulich & Lynch, *Critical Kitaj*, 7.

jacket' without explaining who the author might be.<sup>267</sup> It is an English language edition of Hauptmann's novel *Phantom* and the publisher's abbreviated name appears in the print: Secker, short for Secker & Warburg.<sup>268</sup> And, in the context of a Kitaj print, one cannot help but wonder at the significance of the omission of the latter name.

Today, Hauptmann is little known to the Anglophone world, certainly in comparison to German language authors such as Mann, Hesse or Kafka, although according to Kinsman he was one of Kitaj's favourite German authors.<sup>269</sup> In his day, however, he was arguably the most senior German writer of his generation, a position he himself reinforced by emphasising his physical similarity to Goethe. Amongst his most famous works is *Die Weber (the Weavers)* a play written in Silesian dialect dealing with the suffering of a community of poor weavers at the hands of exploitative factory owners, which caused such controversy that it was initially banned. Even when it was finally allowed a first performance, Wilhelm II refused to see it in protest. Subsequently, *Die Weber* became the subject of a print cycle by Käthe Kollwitz, which Kitaj surely knew. One can see how Hauptmann's proto-Socialist sympathies might have appealed to him at a time when he was painting canvases like *The Murder of Rosa Luxemburg*. A further significance of Hauptmann for Kitaj's print may lie in the fact that he was a native of Silesia, wrote plays, like *Die Weber*, in Silesian dialect, and lived there throughout his life, more pertinently throughout the Second World War and its aftermath. Silesia was one of the eastern states of Germany annexed to Poland after the war and subsequently 'cleansed' of ethnic Germans. Hauptmann, by then old and frail said that he would only leave Silesia feet first

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<sup>267</sup> Miles, *Kitaj: A Print Retrospective*, (London: Victoria & Albert Museum, 1994), unpaginated.

<sup>268</sup> See Ramkalawon, *Kitaj Prints: A Catalogue Raisonné*, 12.

<sup>269</sup> Kinsman, *The Prints of RB Kitaj*, 18.



which, in fact, he did. After his death in 1946, his body was taken from his Silesian home for interment on Hiddensee, an island on the north east German coast, where he had spent every summer. In effect, he became a refugee *post-mortem*.

This print is also significant for being the first occasion on which Kitaj overtly mixes recent European history with autobiography. Gilmour, not unreasonably, interprets this in terms of Kitaj's Jewishness, citing a remark he made many years later in an interview with David Cohen: 'Even in my Vienna days, I shuddered to think of my kind in those streets a few years before'.<sup>270</sup> In Kinsman's catalogue raisonné of the prints, he reinforces this interpretation, saying of the print:

When I was a student in Vienna in the days of Harry Lime, I picked up this little bit of anti-Americana off the undenazified street. It was protesting a visit by Harry Truman's Secretary of State. [...] I was courting a girl from my own Cleveland, Ohio there along the Brown Danube, in Grinzing, in the Vienna Woods, in the Salzkammergut, remembered in this collage. The little boy in my snapshots in the print is Lem, the son we had later. The spot of blood can be a feeble little symbol for what happened in those street five years before my time there. Aus unserem Blut indeed ... the motherfuckers!<sup>271</sup>

Viewed in that light, the splash of red, resembling blood, and the inclusion of his own family becomes a deeply ironic response to the claim 'you won't make dollars from our blood' – this from people who less than a decade earlier had been making Reichsmarks from the blood of Jews and others. Indeed, the overall deep red tones of the print, especially in the pavement which forms a ground to the rest of the imagery, strongly suggest blood.

All of this is fine, of course, except Kitaj's remarks were made retrospectively. The found Acheson text is anti-American and is an expression of a then current fear of Communism, with which some believed the Marshall Plan was associated. So,

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<sup>270</sup> David Cohen, 'The Viennese Inspiration: In Search of Self', in *Royal Academy Magazine*, Winter 1990, 34-36; and Gilmour, *Print Quarterly*, 127.

<sup>271</sup> Kinsman, *The Prints of RB Kitaj*, 19.

although the print may reflect or allude to Nazi anti-Semitism, *Acheson go home* actually records overt hostility towards Americans, in which case it must represent hostility towards the artist himself, as an American. This reading gains force when we consider the observations made by the young Kitaj in his 1951 letter from Vienna: ‘It is in line with the national game in Austria (skrew-the-American-for-whatever-you-can-get)’.<sup>272</sup>

This, then, was the reality behind the Viennese romance he dreamt up for himself as he stared from the window of the Orient Express in 1951, a romance in which he might ‘meet a Vali or a Moira Shearer’ as he suggested to Richard Morphet.<sup>273</sup> The truth is, as the fragment and letter make clear, that the Austrians did not want him, or any other Americans, even if they had just saved the world, although they were happy to take their money.

The figure of Hauptmann can be interpreted equally as a sort of talisman of culture (particularly German culture) which the war was intended to save, an ambiguous reminder that art will survive but cannot save the individual, anymore than faith can, and as an example of the intellectual, a voice at the mercy of larger political events. In fact, much of the imagery in the print brings to mind interracial conflict and segregation as well as questions of identity and belonging. Connor and the civil rights movement in Alabama, is an obvious and, in the early 1960s, a then most urgent case. But it goes further: Hauptmann’s identification with Silesia, a part of Europe cleansed of ethnic Germans, the oblique reference to the Holocaust in the German text and the bloodstain, the text’s anti-Americanism, the cultural identity of Kitaj’s own son, born

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<sup>272</sup> RB Kitaj, letter to Jeanne Brooks, c.1951

<sup>273</sup> Morphet, *RB Kitaj: A Retrospective*, 44. He further entertained this retrospective fantasy in Jake Auerbach’s documentary. Auerbach, *Kitaj: In the Picture*, timecode: 18’ 50” - 19’ 00”.

in Oxford to American-Jewish parents all, in one way or another, turn the print into a meditation on belonging and identity.

The question of what prompted this meditation on Europe's turbulent recent history is probably answered by Kitaj himself when he says the Eichmann trial 'began to disturb something asleep in me'.<sup>274</sup> In any case, *Acheson Go Home* and the two subsequent print series, *Mahler Becomes Politics*, *Beisbol* and *Horizon/Blitz*, mark the beginning of Kitaj's engagement with Jewish European history, albeit in a more oblique way than was to follow in the 1970s.

#### Mahler Becomes Politics, Beisbol

Kitaj's first major print cycle was a series of fifteen sheets grouped under the overall title of *Mahler Becomes Politics, Beisbol*. A small number of the portfolios came with book of poems by Jonathan Williams, which were also inspired by Mahler. The suite was begun in 1964 and took four years to complete. Writing to Marco Livingstone, Kitaj stated 'I came to Mahler then for the first time and did my visual poems to the music.'<sup>275</sup> He judged the results '... kind of nutty but maybe not bad as "citations" (in Benjamin's practice), aberrant quotations and pickings from the world.'<sup>276</sup> It was to be Kitaj's first extended print series, as well as his first collaboration with a writer, in this case the multi-faceted poet, essayist, photographer and publisher, Jonathan Williams (1929-2008).

It was not, however, quite the first time the two had worked together, Kitaj having provided a collage for the cover of Williams' 1963 poetry collection *Lullabies* *Twisters Gibbers and Drags*. Williams and Kitaj were close contemporaries, born in

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<sup>274</sup> Morphet, *RB Kitaj: A Retrospective*, 59.

<sup>275</sup> Livingstone, *RB Kitaj*, 44, footnote 37.

<sup>276</sup> *Ibid.*, 44, footnote 37.

1929 and 1932 respectively. Both were strong Europhiles who lived for sustained periods in England. However, there was one significant difference: whereas Kitaj was a confirmed urbanite, Williams, who hailed from Virginia, was fundamentally a countryman. A true maverick, besides producing his own work, Williams devoted much of his energy to championing writers, artists and photographers who were, in some ways, off the beaten track: Basil Bunting, Harry Callahan, Ian Hamilton Finlay, Ralph Eugene Meatyard, Lorine Niedecker, and Aaron Siskind, for instance, were all celebrated in one form or another.<sup>277</sup> He owned a farmhouse called Corn Close, in Dentdale, Cumbria, which he bought on Bunting's advice and where he lived from May to November each year, the other six months being spent at Skywinding Farm, his home in North Carolina. Kitaj, on the other hand, chose to live at the centre of large conurbations, notably London, Vienna, Paris, San Francisco (Berkeley) and, latterly, Los Angeles. The great outdoors almost never appears in Kitaj's work. Yet he did spend time with Williams out in the wilds of northern England and Scotland. A photograph, entitled *Americans Abroad; Biggar, Lanarkshire 1965*, collaged onto patterned paper, which forms the frontispiece to the *Mahler* portfolio, shows the pair of them arriving, rustically attired in flat caps and tweed jackets, at a country house in Scotland, on their way to visit Hugh MacDiarmid.

The two men met in 1963, at a poetry reading in the artist's local Dulwich pub, The Crown & Greyhound. It was through Williams that Kitaj first got to know the work of contemporary American poets like Robert Creeley and Robert Duncan, with both of whom he quickly became close friends. Obviously the pair had an immediate

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<sup>277</sup> See for instance, Jonathan Williams, *The Magpie's Bagpipe: Selected Essays of Jonathan Williams* (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1982).

rapport for they were soon corresponding in the warmest terms. Here is Kitaj to Williams

I've been reading a Big Table which I [got] from Christofer M.<sup>278</sup>, in which ferlinghetti is thus described: 'a large, easy-going, balding man nearing middle age' and so, of course, I thought of you.....// I sure do like to hear from you..... boy could this town use a few more americans...<sup>279</sup>

The latter remark suggests some frustration with London, presumably with the social and cultural stodge of post-war British society. Perhaps this never left him for, in his *Confessions*, written towards the end of his life, he comments ruefully:

Instead of returning home to America, the Royal College would open a mysterious gray door to un-home in a Londontown I wanted to learn. Here in LA in the 21st century, I'm not sure I ever did learn London.<sup>280</sup>

Kitaj's ambivalence towards London (and perhaps the UK generally) is also revealed, I think, in his association with American writers, which begins at this time, thanks to Williams. Creeley and Duncan have already been mentioned but amongst the other poets he associate with, and celebrated in his art, were Charles Olson, John Weiners, Edward Dorn, Kenneth Rexroth and, latterly, John Ashbery.

Amongst the British writers to appear in Kitaj's work are Michael Hamburger, Christopher Middleton, Hugh MacDiarmid, Basil Bunting and WH Auden. However, Middleton was a Germanist whose poetry exhibits a strong experimental approach which remains at odds with the rather conservative mainstream of British poetry. Hamburger was, in fact born in Germany (his family settled in England after fleeing the Nazis in 1933) and was a poet like Middleton who translated extensively from the German. Bunting was an older, truly maverick figure, from the rearguard of British

<sup>278</sup> Christopher Middleton, (b.1926) British poet and translator, especially from the German, for instance the work of Paul Celan.

<sup>279</sup> Kitaj, letter to Jonathan Williams, The Poetry Collection of the University Libraries, State University of New York at Buffalo. Quoted in Simon Eckett, 'The Poetry Lover: RB Kitaj and the Post-Pound Poets', *PN Review*, vol. 37, no. 3, Jan-Feb 2011, 46.

<sup>280</sup> Kitaj, *Confessions*, 42.

Modernism, who had spent much of his life abroad and was quite outside the literary establishment. MacDiarmid, of course, was a Communist, Scottish Nationalist, controversialist poet who wrote in Scots, and was far too prickly a thistle to appeal to many English aesthetes. Auden, although in comparison to the others an Olympian, was nevertheless also a controversial figure, strongly associated with the politics of the 1930s, who had spent periods living in both America and continental Europe, indeed, he became a naturalized American citizen in 1946. In other words, those British poets Kitaj chose to celebrate were largely atypical, with intellectual and literary interests outside the London literary world. Tellingly, his most overt homage to contemporary poets, the suite of prints *First Series: Some Poets* (1966-70), is chiefly an American affair, featuring portraits of Creeley, Dorn, Duncan, Olson, Rexroth, Wieners and the composer Morton Feldman, with only Auden and MacDiarmid representing Britain (and a distinctly 1930s Left Britain at that).

By 1964, a year after their first meeting Kitaj was portraying the poet as 'Col. J. Williams', wearing a jump-suit and launching himself into the void for the oil painting, *Aureolin*. This image was used as the basis for *Yaller Bird*, a screenprint, also of 1964, which Kitaj describes thus

The drawing in this early print is rather slick. I hope I've come a long way up the drawing path since then, a real long haul, like when Jonathan [Williams] hikes the Appalachian Trail or something. He's the poet-subject here in his Wilderness Drag and I wish I'd drawn him better then and also in the 30+ years of our friendship, he's that dear to me even though he's as much of a kvetch (complainer) as I am, if that's possible. Jonathan has been introducing *other* poets to a diminishing public for 40 years. I was hooked on Pound (**Yaller Bird** is one of E.P.'s Confucians) when I first met JW at a reading he gave at my corner pub, Crown & Greyhound in Dulwich Village. From then on he introduced post-Pound American poetry and many other rare treats into my life and art.<sup>281</sup>

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<sup>281</sup> Kitaj, afterword to *Yaller Bird* (Jonathan Williams) in Kinsman, *The Prints of RB Kitaj*, 22.

The Ezra Pound poem he refers to is *Ode 187*, which has been described as the song of a disgruntled migrant farm-hand<sup>282</sup>

Yaller bird, let my corn alone,  
Yaller bird, let my crawps alone,  
These folks here won't let me eat,  
I wanna go back whaar I can meet  
The folks I used to know at home,  
I got a home an' I wanna' git goin'.

This seems particularly apt for Williams, since he was both nomadic (living in the US and England) and more at home in the country than in the town. In addition, the American vernacular employed by Pound, here and elsewhere, was deeply influential on Williams' own poetic practice, which uses the full orchestra of dialect, idiom, slang, and found phrases to great, if at times eccentric, effect.

*Aureolin* was shown in Kitaj's first one-man New York exhibition in 1965. The catalogue for this show also announced a collaboration between the artist and the poet to be called *Mahler: A Celebration and a Crutch*. Williams wrote forty 'spontaneous' poems after listening to the forty movements of Mahler's ten symphonies and these Kitaj used as 'partial departure-points' for the prints.<sup>283</sup> Amongst the Kitaj Papers preserved in UCLA is a letter from Williams to Kitaj dated 10<sup>th</sup> April 1964 which appears to mark the beginnings of this venture.

Having said so, I will hope to submit unto your very close scrutiny before April is done, my wild new spontaneous sequence: MAHLER. Forty-one short poems, one written to each movement of all the symphonies. This will give you like plenty to cogitate over. What I would like, of course, would be a limited edition, replete with some Kitaj art. If you don't know shit about Mahler, you should. There are excellent music-bookstores in London. One on Cecil Court has books about Gustav. He is mein favorite, mein boy, zo I

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<sup>282</sup> Angela Jung Pallandri, "The Stone is Alive in my Hand" – Ezra Pound's Chinese Translations." [https://scholarsbank.uoregon.edu/xmlui/bitstream/handle/1794/5772/Stone\\_is\\_alive\\_in\\_my\\_hand.pdf?sequence=1](https://scholarsbank.uoregon.edu/xmlui/bitstream/handle/1794/5772/Stone_is_alive_in_my_hand.pdf?sequence=1) Accessed 23.9.2012.

<sup>283</sup> Kitaj, letter to Jonathan Williams, quoted in Eckett, *PN Review*, 46-51.

hopes you like die gedichte und so weiter. So fasten your seat belt and prepare to be snowed.<sup>284</sup>

Presumably, they had been talking about Williams' own current work and, possibly, the idea of working together somehow. The line 'What I would like, of course, would be a limited edition, replete with some Kitaj art' suggests that the idea was mainly Williams'. And it is clear from his closing remarks that Kitaj did not know much about Mahler. He would acknowledge this by including, on the finished portfolio's title-sheet, the comment 'Bob Creeley said it would have been better if Jonathan had done Charles Ives – better for me that is...'<sup>285</sup> However, once Kitaj had read the poems his reaction must have been enthusiastic judging by further letter from Williams dated 22<sup>nd</sup> May 1964.

Dear Ronnie,  
Ja, Lieber Meister, let's snow them with scenes from Gus. I'll leave the layout and all negotiations to your able control. Approve of your alternating scheme – poem on top, image on top. Prefer type (klessic Garamond or the like) to facsimile of my erratic hand.<sup>286</sup>

But the layout suggested here is very different from that which finally appeared. According to the letter, the poem was to have been incorporated into the design, an approach Kitaj would use later, in 1967, with *A Sight*, his first collaboration with Robert Creeley. And, indeed, on that occasion, he included the poem in Creeley's handwriting, just the kind of facsimile Williams did not want.<sup>287</sup>

Kitaj explained to Williams that he was 'hoping final Mahlers will amount to about 15 prints – some associated with *whole* symphonies, some with specific movements,

<sup>284</sup> Jonathan Williams, letter to RB Kitaj dated 10<sup>th</sup> April 1964. UCLA, RB Kitaj Papers (Collection 1741) Box 61, Folder 8.

<sup>285</sup> The titlepage is a sheet of patterned paper onto which are stuck four printed sheets of different sizes. These include the title of the portfolio, the titles of the prints, technical data, and the text quoted.

<sup>286</sup> Jonathan Williams, letter to RB Kitaj dated 22<sup>nd</sup> May 1964. UCLA, RB Kitaj Papers (Collection 1741) Box 61, Folder 8.

<sup>287</sup> The original hand-drafted copy of Creeley's poem is preserved amongst the Kitaj Papers at UCLA.



some like nothing'.<sup>288</sup> Whatever the genesis of the idea, the series had the enthusiastic backing of the Marlborough Gallery's Harry Fischer, as Kitaj acknowledged in the New York catalogue:

Thanks are due to H.R. Fischer for his encouragement of the work at hand which will often spring from music which he knows in ways I never will.<sup>289</sup>

According to Kinsman, Fischer had originally proposed that Kitaj make a print series based on nursery rhymes but this idea did not appeal to him. Instead, Kitaj suggested Mahler as a theme, a proposal highly congenial to Fischer, who had been partly brought up in Austria and, like the composer, was Jewish.<sup>290</sup> If that is the case, it strongly suggests that Williams had already been talking to Kitaj about Mahler. I do not imagine Kitaj would suggest to Fischer a print series on someone he knew next to nothing about. However, if Mahler was congenial to Fischer, he was clearly most congenial to Kitaj once Williams had whet his appetite. In fact, it seems reasonable to assume that both Williams and Fischer encouraged Kitaj's interest in Mahler and associated topics. Fischer, for instance, certainly seems to have discussed recent history with Kitaj. In a letter, dated 24<sup>th</sup> Jan 1968, he talks about Kitaj possibly exhibiting at Kestner Gesellschaft, in Hanover, after meeting its director, Wieland Schmied. He goes on to say

When we see each other again, I'll tell you more about the history of the Kestner Gesellschaft which has a very interesting anti-Nazi record. They were forcibly closed down in 1937 following the Franz Marc exhibition in the "anti-Kunst" trend. Henry Moore had his first exhibition on the continent of Europe at the Kestner Gesellschaft, also many other artists, and Schmied is very anxious that your exhibition should go there first following the London exhibition.<sup>291</sup>

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<sup>288</sup> RB Kitaj, letter to Jonathan Williams, quoted in Eckett, *PN Review*, 47.

<sup>289</sup> Kinsman, *The Prints of RB Kitaj*, 26.

<sup>290</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>291</sup> Harry Fischer letter to Kitaj, 24.1.1968. UCLA, RB Kitaj Papers, (Collection 1741), Box 67, Folder 2.

One cannot help wondering how much Fischer helped foster Kitaj's own interest in recent Jewish history. Certainly, Fischer, an émigré like Walter Kitaj, must have seemed the perfect dealer for an artist as deeply immersed in the political culture of early-20<sup>th</sup> century Europe as Kitaj. According to Tony Reichardt, Fischer's origins were

Vienna before the war, he knew Kokoschka pretty well and the museum directors in Germany and was much more involved with Impressionism, German Expressionism ... the Austro-Hungarian Soldier was very expressionistic and dramatic, which Fischer adored because of his background.<sup>292</sup>

It was on the strength of such painterly works as the 1961 canvas *Austro-Hungarian Foot Soldier* that Fischer apparently agreed to sign Kitaj up for Marlborough.

Nevertheless, he was initially disappointed and unconvinced by the more representative Pop-inflected work that soon began to arrive at the gallery.<sup>293</sup>

It was against this background, then, that he began his acquaintance with Gustav Mahler and embarked on a series of prints prompted by the symphonies and Jonathan Williams' poems. Like Gerhart Hauptmann, who appears in *Acheson Go Home*, or Walter Benjamin, Mahler is a significant intellectual or artistic figure whose work and life Kitaj uses as a frame or filter through which to explore European history.

The fifteen sheets comprising the Mahler series are grouped under the overall title of *Mahler Becomes Politics, Beisbol*. This playful nod to Eugene O'Neill's cycle of plays *Mourning Becomes Electra* combined with the Hispano-American word for baseball apparently reflected Kitaj's belief that popular sports, like baseball, meant

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<sup>292</sup> Kinsman, *The Prints of RB Kitaj*, 10.

<sup>293</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

more to people than politics.<sup>294</sup> In his notes for the Tate Gallery catalogue entry for the series, Kitaj writes that

‘Beisbol’ is a phonetic rendering of the pronunciation south of the United States border of ‘baseball’.<sup>295</sup>

But, if that is the case, it is not exactly clear how it works since the title conflates politics, sport and high art. In any case, why use the Spanish word for such a quintessentially US sport as baseball? There is another potential reading of the title I would like to propose. We know Kitaj was acquainted with German, for in the letter to his mother from Vienna he makes it clear.

I have been here about three weeks now and I think I have integrated very well. (On the train in Attnang-Puchheim [sic] an Austrian lady told me that I speak quite well for being here only 2 weeks.)<sup>296</sup>

Even if he did not keep the language up, he would have retained some residual familiarity. He may well have been aware, for example, that *Maler* is the German for ‘painter’, and even if he was not, Jonathan Williams certainly would. Understood in this light, I tentatively propose that ‘Mahler/*Maler* becomes politics’ can be read as a pun, and one most appropriate for a painter so concerned with European political history. Kitaj, like Jonathan Williams, was an avowed fan of Ezra Pound and may have meant this punning to be read ironically: do politics really become the artist? They had not, after all, done Pound much good. Even the use of *Beisbol* for baseball can take on a fresh resonance if we recall that *Beispiel* means ‘example’ in German, especially as the Spanish word, to be accurate, is spelled with an accent. *béisbol*. So the title, *Mahler Becomes Politics, Beisbol*, may have been intended as a multilingual pun, in the manner of James Joyce’s *Finnegans Wake*. This reading is clearly

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<sup>294</sup> Kinsman, *The Prints of RB Kitaj*, 28.

<sup>295</sup> RB Kitaj, in *The Tate Gallery 1968-70*, (London: Tate Gallery, 1970).

<sup>296</sup> RB Kitaj, letter to Jeanne Brooks, October 1<sup>st</sup>, no year but circa 1951. UCLA, Kitaj Papers, Box 119, Folder 34. Clearly he did not speak it so well for he misspells Attnang-Puchheim, the major rail junction through which he must have passed on his way to Vienna on the Orient Express.

speculative but, given Kitaj's broad reading in Modernist literature and his close friendships with numerous writers, it does not seem unduly far-fetched. After all, the work of the very man who seems to have initiated the collaboration, Jonathan Williams, is riddled with just this kind of wordplay and Kitaj's paintings and prints are similarly compacted with visual rhymes, puns and allusions. Why should he not have employed similar tactics with his titles? We should not overlook, either, the influence of Duchamp on Kitaj at this time. The French artist's work is full of clever linguistic games in which the title can radically alter the reading of the image. For example, his assisted readymade version of the *Mona Lisa*, of 1919, in which she sports a dandy moustache and beard, bears the cryptic title *L.H.O.O.Q.* Though not quite meaningless in English (it could be an aspirated 'look') its full flavour is only revealed when the letters are pronounced individually in French, for it then becomes something like *Elle á chaud au cul*, or 'she's got a hot arse'.

As finally published, the *Mahler* suite consisted of fifteen prints, plus a title sheet and a frontispiece, in an edition of seventy. Sheets 1-30 were published with a book of Williams' *Mahler* poems, signed and numbered by the author.<sup>297</sup>

Williams' poems correspond in their titles and divisions to Mahler's Symphonies. However, their correlation with Kitaj's prints is less clear. The print, for instance, *The Flood of Laymen* features a trellis-like pattern, a man with arms raised holding club or sword about to strike, wasps' nest (taken from *Scientific American*), text and illustrations to a story entitled *His Phony Fish*, and grass. The print is linked to the fourth movement of Mahler's *Symphony No. 6, in A Minor*.

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<sup>297</sup> At the end of the book, Williams includes a note concerning his compositional method, which, in the case of the poem *Symphony No. 7, in B Minor*, involved the use of an 'Hallucinatory Deck' a 'personal, alchemical deck of 55 cards on which are written 110 words – the private and most meaningful words in my poetic vocabulary.'

it is the *hero*  
on whom fall  
three blows of fate,

the last of which  
fells him  
as a tree is felled.<sup>298</sup>

Kitaj makes the relationship explicit in the brief note he penned for the catalogue to his 1965 New York show at Marlborough Gerson Gallery.

For the 4th movement of the 6th (Tragic) symphony ... (destruction of the hero?)  
'The flood of laymen will in the end submerge us all and dance on our graves ... the layman regards the artist as a sort of Jew.'  
— Ford Madox Ford  
In 'It Was The Nightingale'.<sup>299</sup>

He also wrote, in the same publication, that he intended to include two images concerning the German anti-Nazi movement The White Rose Group, 'with the intention of honouring the memory of Hans and Sophie Scholl' and the prints were to be titled called *For the White Rose* and *Leaflets of the White Rose*.<sup>300</sup> Only one found its way into the published portfolio, and with a different title: *Go and Get Killed Comrade – We Need a Byron in the Movement*, (fig. 41) alluding to a comment made by the British Communist Leader Harry Pollitt to the poet Stephen Spender regarding his plan to fight in the Spanish Civil War.<sup>301</sup> An alternative version was produced but never editioned (fig. 42). The published print includes a cartoonish running figure with upraised arm combined with a photograph of a steam train rushing through a snowy landscape, a ladder, a white rose and two newsprint photographs of Sophie Scholl, one of the youthful leaders of the resistance group, who was executed in 1943.

<sup>298</sup> Jonathan Williams, *Jubilant Thicket: New & Selected Poems* (Port Townsend: Copper Canyon Press, 2005), 79.

<sup>299</sup> RB Kitaj, *RB Kitaj* (New York: Marlborough-Gerson Gallery, 1965), unpaginated.

<sup>300</sup> Kitaj, *RB Kitaj*, unpaginated.

<sup>301</sup> Kinsman, *The Prints of RB Kitaj*, 32.

The same image is repeated twice, first with the caption ‘Hans and Sophie Scholl / Curiously unappreciated’ and again with the caption ‘The leaders of the “White Rose” movement’. Kitaj wrote an afterword for this image in which he ruminated on the German anti-Hitler resistance:

The German Widerstand must have been extraordinary ... a fascinating slip of thing there at the black heart of darkness, easy to snuff out, to behead. Maybe Sophie Scholl in her university classroom was even lonelier than a Jew about to die among her own ... Or is that too poetical?<sup>302</sup>

Trains, railway tracks, train compartments and station canopies recur throughout Kitaj’s work, especially in the 1960s but even into the 1980s, evoking the flight of refugees and the transportation of Jews and others victims of Nazism to the concentration camps<sup>303</sup>. The action of paintings such as *Synchromy with FB – General of Hot Desire, The Jew, Etc.*, and *The Jewish Rider*, all takes place aboard a train. There is more than a suggestion of flight, threat and violence (physical or emotional) in these paintings. Francis Bacon’s own 1967 canvas *Triptych Inspired by TS Eliot’s Poem Sweeney Agonistes*, which Kitaj may well have known, features the bloodied bed of a *wagon lit* as its central panel. Kitaj’s portrait of Bacon, *Synchromy with FB* (1968-69), shows the older artist standing in a train compartment alongside a reclining nude who is about to be strangled by a strange cartoon-like figure – creating another sexual psychodrama within the confines of a train.<sup>304</sup> Railway sidings and tracks also appear in the prints *World Ruin Through Black Magic* (1963), *The Reduction of Anxiety in Terminal Patients* (1965), *What is a Comparison* (1964), *Bacon I* (1968) and the canvases *Sorrows of Belgium* (fig. 60) and *Trout for Factitious Bait*. It is perhaps tempting to view all railway imagery in Kitaj as a reference to the Holocaust and the transportation of Jews to the death camps. Yet, we should not forget that the

<sup>302</sup> Kinsman, *The Prints of RB Kitaj*, 33.

<sup>303</sup> Gilmour also speculates about the significance of this imagery in *Print Quarterly*, 129.

<sup>304</sup> A similar balloon-like figure, also entangled with a naked woman, appears in *Juan de la Cruz*, 1967.

railway is, first and foremost, a symbol of industrialisation, technology and modernity.<sup>305</sup> In the visual arts, JMW Turner's *Rain, Steam, Speed* or, later, Monet's *Interior of the Gare Sainte-Lazare* and Manet's *Le Chemin de Fer* (1873) represent some of the best known early depictions of this most significant of technological advances.

Other iconography within the Mahler series most certainly does evoke European anti-Semitism. For instance, the parade of hands running along the upper register of *The Cultural Value of Fear, Distrust and Hypochondria* (fig. 43) moves, when read from left to right, *from human to rat*. This could imply de-humanisation either of a culture or society which sees others as less than human or the literal degradation of Jews and others during the Holocaust, or indeed both. Tellingly, the hands and paws are shown above a railway line. The comparison of Jews with rats was common within Nazi propaganda. The 1940 film *Der ewige Jude* (*The Eternal Jew*) for instance, features a series of scenes showing rats consuming grain and swarming in packs, a clear reference to Hitler's equation of rats with Jews in *Mein Kampf*, in which, for instance, he describes how:

The Jew remains united only if forced by a common danger or is attracted by a common booty; if both reasons are no longer evident, then the qualities of the crassest egoism come into their own, and, in a moment, the united people becomes a horde of rats, fighting bloodily among themselves.<sup>306</sup>

The commentary accompanying these scenes of swarming rats in *Der ewige Jude* is equally unambiguous in anti-Semitism:

Comparable with the Jewish wanderings through history are the mass migrations of an equally restless animal, the rat ... Wherever rats appear they bring ruin, they ravage human property and foodstuffs. In this way they spread

<sup>305</sup> Jane Kinsman interprets the railway further as a symbol of the Russian Revolution: 'from one such train Trotsky ran his military campaign.' Kinsman, *The Prints of RB Kitaj*, 32.

<sup>306</sup> Adolf Hitler, (multiple trans. and eds.), *Mein Kampf* (New York: Reynal & Hitchcock, 1942) 416. <https://archive.org/details/meinkampf035176mbp> accessed 9.1.2016.

disease: plague, leprosy, typhoid, cholera, dysentery, etc. They are cunning, cowardly, and cruel and are found mostly in packs. In the animal world they represent the element of craftiness and subterranean destruction – no different from the Jews among mankind!<sup>307</sup>

*The Cultural Value of Fear, Distrust and Hypochondria*, indeed! The dominant image of this print is railway tracks (as already mentioned) and they are overlaid with patches of red, which could be read as suggesting blood, in much the same way as the patch of red in *Acheson Go Home*. Oranges, yellows and reds predominate throughout this particular image. Given the title and imagery, it is hard not to conclude that this print refers specifically to the Holocaust. As Kitaj was almost as keen a cinephile as he was a bibliophile, it does not seem too far-fetched to suppose that he was familiar with *Der ewige Jude*, and its anti-Semitic symbolism. Still, he never seems to have mentioned it. On the other hand, he did make explicit reference to another anti-Semitic German film of 1940, *Jud Süß (Jew Süß)*. A still from this latter movie appears in both the collage and the subsequent print *Boys and Girls!* which had originally been intended for the *Mahler* suite but was subsequently dropped and issued as an independent sheet. Kitaj was, then, looking at Nazi propaganda films whilst composing the prints for *Mahler Becomes Politics, Beisbol*. Kitaj was open about the source of this detail, writing in the catalogue of his 1965 New York exhibition ‘lower right Werner Krauss in the lead role in the anti-Semitic film *Jud Süß*.’<sup>308</sup>

### Struggle in the West – The Bombing of London

Discussions of Kitaj’s screenprints, such as there are, tend to focus on series like *Mahler Becomes Politics, Beisbol*, and the long-term project *In Our Time: Covers for a Small Library after the Life for the Most Part*. The portfolio I want to analyse next,

<sup>307</sup> David Welch, *Propaganda: Power and Persuasion* (London: The British Library, 2013), 182.

<sup>308</sup> Kitaj, *RB Kitaj*, unpaginated.



*Struggle in the West: The Bombing of London*, is less well known. As we shall see, Kitaj began work on it whilst living in California. Jane Kinsman speculates that the London theme may have been prompted by nostalgia for his old home and the correspondence with Prater supports this idea.<sup>309</sup> On more than one occasion, he concludes letters with remarks such as

Well – it will be good to see you all again and London town. I'll bring details of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Blitz sheet and finish it all there with you.<sup>310</sup>

Or again

Not one drop of rain since we got here but I miss you all and olde London town and all my English habits and vices...<sup>311</sup>

Elsi Kitaj's responses to California and longing to return to Europe have already been mentioned.

The series *Struggle in the West*, as finally published, comprises seven sheets of various sizes, in both landscape and portrait formats. Iconographically, the imagery is diverse but inter-related and includes the witty, the austere deadpan and, in one case at least, the dazzling. It was an edition of seventy presented in a linen covered box made by Rudolf Rieser in Cologne. Overall there were five to ten Artist's Proofs, two to five Printer's Proofs and Hors de Commerce, and five Trial Proofs of the sheet *Die gute alte Zeit*.<sup>312</sup>

The first inklings of the series emerge in an aerogramme letter to Chris Prater postmarked 18 August 1967. This begins with some general remarks regarding *The Defects of its Qualities* and a second, unidentified print. Having cleared up a few

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<sup>309</sup> Kinsman, *The Prints of RB Kitaj*, 54.

<sup>310</sup> RB Kitaj, letter to Chris Prater, undated. Pallant House, Kitaj Archive, Letter 10.

<sup>311</sup> RB Kitaj, letter to Chris Prater, postmarked 18<sup>th</sup> August 1967. Pallant House, Kitaj Archive, Letter 18.

<sup>312</sup> Kinsman, *The Prints of RB Kitaj*, 148.

points regarding those two items, Kitaj outlines his plans for a new series at some length.

Those photos you sent are brilliant and now I want to plan out a set of 3 sheets. Not really a set because I want them to stay together and depend on each other even if they are hung in 3 separate frames. The theme will be London during the Blitz or something like that and the first sheet will be an easy one I think – it will basically present those 4 superb photos and it must not be shown alone because it will not really be a print but a vehicle for those photos in association with the next 2 sheets which should be proper prints – with some complexity. And the 3 sheets, when complete should feel and be like one work. O.K. then ... the first sheet will look like this: Take a sheet from the fat yellow book you gave me: Y272/VARIEGATED CROCODILE. Reduce the sizes of the photos somewhat and have them reproduced for glueing down onto the crocodile (as I said, this first one of 3 will not be a print). I would like them very clear and shiny and so I guess they should be reproduced like we did the trichromatic baseball ones. (See my diagram for positioning). Then, along the bottom of the crocodile, I would like a strip of another paper: Y202/BURMA LIZARD, upon which the titles are to be mounted. I will write the title(s) out by hand and send to you under separate cover – you enlarge them to the size indicated in diagram. This first sheet will not be for sale alone, but only as an introduction to the next two prints which I'll begin to work out now.<sup>313</sup>

Kitaj's enthusiasm is apparent and infectious. Indeed, all the letters have this same degree of engagement. Obviously, he found working on the screenprints, even from the distance of California, exciting and challenging. He certainly does not give the impression that this is the stuff of 'potboilers', as he would later describe them.<sup>314</sup>

Perhaps it was the environment. He signs off, typically, with:

Well, dear friends – sunshine everyday! Not one drop of rain since we got here but I miss you all and olde London town and all my English habits and vices ... we're gettin (*sic*) Calif. regulation BROWN. All my love R<sup>315</sup>

However, in a letter to Michael Hamburger, sent within days of the one to Prater, Elsi

Kitaj presents a somewhat fuller and less rosy picture of late-60s California.

<sup>313</sup> RB Kitaj, letter to Chris Prater, undated but postmarked 18<sup>th</sup> August 1967. Pallant House, Kitaj Archive, letter 18.

<sup>314</sup> Kinsman, *The Prints of RB Kitaj*, 34.

<sup>315</sup> Kitaj, letter to Chris Prater, undated but postmarked 18<sup>th</sup> August 1967. Pallant House, Kitaj Archive, letter 18.

I really don't know how we shall last two years in this country – I am completely unfit for this society after nearly seventeen years in Europe – even the supermarkets – or, rather, especially the supermarkets depress me – along with the rotting cities, the endless advertising, the racial tension, the lack of any sane medical plan for people. California is absolutely too relaxed and casual for my taste and the hot scene doesn't seem anything more than America's little left Bank – a little mini bohemia. I really don't think it's going to alter the course of thing[s] in this country – everything seems hopeless.<sup>316</sup>

The four 'superb photos' Kitaj talks about in his letter are of Cyril Connolly, Stephen Spender, Louis MacNeice and the Rt.Hon. John Strachey, and this sheet was to become the 'prologue', as he calls it, of the finished series, its final title being *Horizon/Blitz* (fig. 44). Clearly he saw the prints in very formal terms right from the start and had strong ideas about how to display them: they are not a 'set', which I take to mean a group of independent but linked images, like *Mahler*..., but comprise in effect one work which is more than the sum of its parts. As such they should be seen together, even if framed individually and hung on a wall. He is explicit on that point: 'I want them to stay together and depend on each other ... [they] should feel and be like one work' (Kitaj's emphasis). The use of the term prologue is a clue here, for each sheet amplifies or develops themes common to all within the group, rather like a section of a poem or a chapter of a book. Kitaj wrote over every available part of the aerogramme (which was a single sheet that folded up to create its own envelope) and on one flap included a sketch diagram of the image with instructions and musings. The photos should be cropped so that no white margin appears except at the bottom, where there is text. He obviously had a title in mind but it was provisional: 'blitz / part one: London calling'. And on one area he is still undecided: 'I may leave this area empty of imagery or, later collage some image here. (We'll wait & see).'<sup>317</sup> A later brief note and sketch confirms the earlier instructions but the title has changed to

<sup>316</sup> Elsi Kitaj, letter to Michael Hamburger, dated (postmark) 26.8.1967. Leeds University, Michael Hamburger Archive.

<sup>317</sup> Kitaj, letter to Chris Prater, postmarked 18<sup>th</sup> August 1967. Pallant House, Kitaj Archive, letter 18.

‘horizon /blitz’.<sup>318</sup> Kitaj was understandably worried about the collaged sections of the sheet, adding almost as an aside ‘I sure hope that you will be able always to get loose elements really well and permanently pasted down without buckling etc.’ As published, the sheet appeared much as he had foreseen it. It is, as he states right at the outset, not exactly a print, more of a collaged multiple (as we would say today) with photographs glued to the silkscreened reptile-skin ground. Something of Kitaj’s droll humour is apparent in this work which shows members of the English intelligentsia engaged in war work. The captions appended to the photos describe MacNeice as a BBC scriptwriter, the youthful, grinning Spender as a fireman (he even wears his uniform in the image) and Strachey as Air Raid Warden and Under Secretary of State. Connolly alone, and looking suitably self-important, is simply ‘a leader of the literary *avant garde*’. The title itself collides the high-minded utopianism of the Modernist avant-garde (*Horizon* was a magazine founded and edited by Connolly) with the brutal yet mundane reality of a modern world war. It is another example of Kitaj placing of intellectuals and artists within a framework of historical circumstances, as he did with Hauptmann in *Acheson Go Home*. In the case of the *Prologue*, there is a strong implication that the purpose of art and the role of the artist are being examined.

The next two sheets to go into development, and the ones Kitaj was presumably referring to in the 18 August letter, were *Die gute alte Zeit* (called *Blitz* #2) (fig. 45) and a sheet called *Blitz* #3, which ultimately was abandoned. Technically and iconographically, *Die gute alte Zeit* is a tour de force of printmaking and Kitaj knew it would be from the outset:

Dear Chris – on the back of this sheet are instructions for the 2<sup>nd</sup> blitz print. As you can see it’s real CRAZY in terms of all those slices of pasted down fancy paper. I want this one to be the most extraordinary color job (complicated)

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<sup>318</sup> Kitaj, letter to Chris Prater, undated (but 1967). Pallant House, Kitaj Archive, letter 19.

we've ever done – like I'd like to throw as much color and color combinations into it as we can...<sup>319</sup>

The 'instructions' consist of an annotated grid diagram (again, the grid). A large square is divided into various sections, with two squares, A and B, at the corners and, in the middle, a square divided into sixteen numbered boxes, one of which, number 2, was intended to house a photo of Robert Duncan's partner, Jess Collins. This letter also contains further evidence of Kitaj's faith in Prater's abilities for, a little further on, he says

of course all the square images are to be made the same size (except the corner tiger skin images which may be larger if you design it that way) you may design all proportions to fit your needs...<sup>320</sup> (Kitaj's emphasis)

The title, 'blitz / part two', occupies a large rectangle in the lower register and, Kitaj stipulates, should be printed the same size and on the same paper as for the first sheet. In fact, the title was intended to be 'blitz / part two an exhortatory letter to the English'. Letter 50 in the Pallant House archive even preserves Kitaj's hand written original with its accompanying instructions. As we know, he changed his mind and a sheet of stiff card, also in Chichester, has instructions for the new title and how it should be presented – as a bullet-hole pattern with individual letters in each hole, the same as was used for the *Charles Olson* portrait from the *Some Poets* portfolio, which he was working on at around the same time:

holes should be each a diff. colour from the rest of the print with either white or black letters Die Gute alte Zeit.<sup>321</sup>

This title was taken from a photograph, which appears in the central grid, showing a 1930s German street scene with an election poster of Hitler pasted alongside another advert reading 'Die gute alte Zeit'. At the top of the grid a man picks up the milk

<sup>319</sup> Kitaj, letter to Chris Prater, undated but c.1967-8. Pallant House, Kitaj Archive, letter 49.

<sup>320</sup> Kitaj, Pallant House, letter 49.

<sup>321</sup> RB Kitaj, letter to Chris Prater, undated. Pallant House, Kitaj Archive, unnumbered.

from his doorstep. Below is an image of Dover after an air-raid. Beneath the grid is a wide, duplicated strip showing men in a 1920s dole queue which calls to mind the economic environment which provided the political conditions for the war and the men who would be enlisted.<sup>322</sup> Taken together, these images suggest the fortitude with which ordinary people faced hardship before, during and after the war. A small panel derived from a pulp illustration entitled *Confession by Force*, showing an SS officer overseeing the flogging of a young woman, emphasises the turpitude of Fascism and other forms of totalitarianism.

As with the prologue, Kitaj seems fascinated with the expressive possibilities of the patterned papers in Chris Prater's yellow sample book. In the margins surrounding the central grid, he has noted various papers the printer could try out: A4144 Gold Tiverton or A4135 Silver Tiverton; D 1993 Lincoln or E2002 Lincoln; B4105 York Royal or B4103 York Royal; Y218A Morocco or Y208A Levant; and 'again lower part to be a pasted down fancy paper' with three options mooted.<sup>323</sup> As the image progressed, Kitaj changed his mind, having 'decided I may prefer certain kinds of wallpaper that may have been used during the Blitz period instead of fancy papers'.<sup>324</sup> And, to that end, Rose, Chris Prater's wife, scoured the shops looking for examples of the appropriate vintage to be applied to the finished image.<sup>325</sup> This elaborate image went through a staggering fifty-seven proofs, resulting in appropriately hefty invoice from Kelpra, something that clearly must have caused some wincing amongst the Marlborough directorate. In one short letter Kitaj tells Prater about a phone call he had received from Gilbert Lloyd of the Marlborough Gallery, in New York, complaining that 'he would have a hard time explaining the bill for that one'. In fact,

<sup>322</sup> Kinsman, *The Prints of RB Kitaj*, 56.

<sup>323</sup> RB Kitaj, letter to Chris Prater, undated. Pallant House, Kitaj Archive, letter 49.

<sup>324</sup> RB Kitaj, letter to Chris Prater, undated but c.1967-8. Pallant House, Kitaj Archive, letter 22.

<sup>325</sup> Gilmour, Pat. *Kelpra Studio: The Rose and Chris Prater Gift*. London: Tate Gallery, 1980, 33.

according to Prater's daybook, the bill for his work on *Die gute alte Zeit* was £600, making it far and away the most expensive of Kitaj's prints to produce. 'I told him it was entirely my fault', wrote a not altogether convincingly contrite Kitaj, and 'I'd control my excesses'.<sup>326</sup> The next invoice in the Kelpra daybook regarding work with him is for *Safeguarding of Life*, which would become the third sheet of *Struggle in the West*. This time the image had gone through twenty-four proofs and amassed a bill for £420 – still a large amount, so he obviously had not been entirely successful at self-control.<sup>327</sup> The point here, I think, is that it reinforces the fact that he was deeply engaged with this project, as he was with all the screenprints, and was prepared to follow an idea wherever it took him, even if it meant pushing his luck with Marlborough. Furthermore, it suggests he was interested in the print for its own sake rather than simply as a means to make money. And again one is reminded that he is doing all of this whilst trying to teach and set up home in Los Angeles. When writing to Michael Hamburger in 1967, just as Kitaj was embarking on *Horizon/Blitz*, Elsi Kitaj observed 'Ron has set up shop in the University but is getting a slow start because of the endless trivia which has to be attended to when one is living in a transient state'.<sup>328</sup> Clearly, he picked up speed. And, if he was not in California he was off travelling elsewhere, like Jim Dine's place in Vermont.<sup>329</sup> In spite of all these obstacles, he was determined to achieve his aims for this work. Although he clearly did hope that the prints would provide an addition income stream, they were not pot boiler stuff intended just to make easy money.<sup>330</sup>

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<sup>326</sup> Kitaj, letter to Chris Prater, undated but c.1967-8. Pallant House, Kitaj Archive, letter 65.

<sup>327</sup> Kelpra Daybook, 1969, Tate Archive TGA862/2.

<sup>328</sup> Elsi Kitaj, letter to Michael Hamburger, dated (postmark) 26.8.1967. Leeds University, Michael Hamburger Archive.

<sup>329</sup> RB Kitaj, letter to Chris Prater, undated. Pallant House, Kitaj Archive, letter 68.

<sup>330</sup> Kinsman, *The Prints of RB Kitaj*, 34.

The third sheet initially proposed for *Horizon/Blitz* was another complex figurative composition. As with *Blitz #2* it included the phrase *An Exhortatory Letter to the English* (fig. 46). This time, there were no fancy papers and the image has stylistic affinities with his paintings of the time – indeed, the components are exactly the same, barring a few details, as in the canvas *Goodbye To Europe* (fig. 47). In fact, this sparsely painted image probably came before the print for Kitaj refers in a subsequent note to ‘the original painted drawing’.<sup>331</sup> Many of Kitaj’s drawings on canvas, made using a paint-soaked stump or crayon, were photographed for inclusion in the screenprints. The portraits comprising *First Series – Some Poets*, for instance, such as Robert Duncan in *Star Betelgeuse*, are based on these small canvases. *Blitz #3* featured a Boston terrier with a luggage label round its neck, a bathtub, a step-ladder, equipment for the game of quoits, and a pole bearing the ‘exhortatory letter’ phrase along its length and with an arrowhead stuck in the top, all on what look like floorboards. Regarding the text on the pole, Kitaj asks that Prater:

make it about the size of the space involved if you can and if there is space left over begin to repeat it ie ... TO THE ENGLISH AN EXHORTATORY LETTER T etc’<sup>332</sup>

On the label round the dog’s neck, Kitaj intended to print an image of a man approaching a prostitute, a design he appropriated, according to Kinsman, from ‘a pulp novel I can’t remember’.<sup>333</sup> The book seems to have been *Sinful Cities of the Western World*, by Hendrik De Leeuw, printed by the Citadel Press of New York in 1934.<sup>334</sup> It describes prostitution and brothels in Nazi Berlin and has this composition on the front cover. He would revisit this vignette in the 1970s, turning it into a subject in its own right as the drawing and prints *A Life/Femme du Peuple*. However,

<sup>331</sup> RB Kitaj, letter to Chris Prater, undated. Pallant House, Kitaj Archive, letter 22.

<sup>332</sup> Kitaj, letter to Chris Prater, undated. Pallant House, Kitaj Archive, letter 20.

<sup>333</sup> Kinsman, *The Prints of RB Kitaj*, 107.

<sup>334</sup> See Mel Gordon, *Voluptuous Panic*, (Los Angeles: Feral House, 2000) 250.



in these later works, he transcribed the image, altering it to suit his purposes, whereas, in the Blitz print, he simply reproduced it photographically.

These diverse elements were to be printed on a sheet of Elephant size paper, making this sheet by far the largest element of the series. There had obviously been some preliminary work going on for, in another of the letters to Prater, Kitaj asks him to ‘move the dog and the parts of the game below the dog into the *new* positions indicated by my diagram’ (my emphasis). Once again, despite the sketch, some latitude was allowed the printmaker, for ‘no enlargement of the images seems necessary – just crowd everything together to fit’. What was ‘very important’ was that the entire composition be reversed.<sup>335</sup> Of course, the compositional study is fairly detailed so Prater was obviously not expected to make wholesale changes but Kitaj seems, in this and numerous other cases, to have given him freedom to make decisions when faced with practical problems. The relationship has similarities to the one between a film director and his cinematographer.

However, in the case of *Blitz #3*, something did not work to Kitaj’s satisfaction. In a letter referring to a set of proofs for this sheet, *Blitz #2* and *Ctric News Topi*, he admits ‘as it stands now this looks impossible for me to save – it was just not a very good set of ideas for a print’.<sup>336</sup> He goes on to tell Prater to destroy all the old proofs, although he did request a few proofs of the basic image printed in a single colour on a plain white paper ‘so that I can see how my original composition looks printed without all the subsequent changes and colors’. It is hard to guess from this what Kitaj felt wasn’t working. Possibly it was just too ordinary, too much like a conventional picture. The remark about the ‘subsequent changes and colours’ does

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<sup>335</sup> RB Kitaj, letter to Chris Prater, undated. Pallant House, Kitaj Archive, letter 21.

<sup>336</sup> RB Kitaj, letter to Chris Prater, undated. Pallant House, Kitaj Archive, letter 22.

suggest it had become bogged down to the point where he could not see where to go next, hence the need to strip it back to a monochrome and get an uncluttered view of it 'so that I may still save the idea and work on it' (Kitaj's emphasis). As all that was available for study, until very recently, were the letters, sketches and the oil painting any theories about the matter had to remain purely speculative. However, shortly before his death, Kitaj gave the British Museum a tranche of prints and drawings which included several items not included in Kinsman and amongst these was a proof of *Blitz #3*. The initial impression, apart from its imposing size, is that this print does not have the visual panache of a sheet like *Die Gute Alte Zeit*. The individual elements are there and reversed, as per the written instructions. They have a grainy texture, which belies their origins in the canvas *Goodbye to Europe*, but this sits oddly with the rest of the image, which is printed in very flat colours, including an overpowering viridian. Whether these were failings Kitaj recognised we cannot know but, for whatever reason, he subsequently jettisoned the print from the series.

Unfortunately, the letters charting the development of the remainder of *Struggle in the West* do not survive, except for one large sketch. Although they are very similar to one another, the five prints differ from the *Prologue* and *Die Gute Alte Zeit* in being iconographically ambiguous, austere and, indeed, almost abstract. They comprise *Safeguarding of Life* (fig. 48), *Setpiece 1* (fig. 49), *Setpiece 2* (fig. 50), *Setpiece 3* (fig. 51) and *On the Safeguarding of Life in Theaters (Epilogue)* (fig. 52). The latter print resembles most closely the sheets Kitaj was producing concurrently for the series *In Our Time*, being apparently a straight reproduction of the front and back covers of a book. In this case, the volume is *On the Safeguarding of Life in Theaters; being a study from the standpoint of an engineer*, by one John Ripley Freeman, which was

published in New York in 1906. Pages from this book illustrating escape routes and safety devices appear as montaged images in the sheet *Safeguarding of Life*.

The four remaining prints feature vertical, rectangular panels, containing alternately ambiguous imagery and flat colour fields, arranged across the sheet in an undulating pattern. The images are derived from photographs of fabric strips which have been burnt at one end causing them to twist, shrivel and blister. These strips had been used in flammability tests.<sup>337</sup> Within the context of the whole series (and we shouldn't forget Kitaj's intention that they 'should feel and be like one work') these charred fragments evoke, with a masterly economy of means, the devastation visited on London and Londoners during the Blitz, as well as the wider ravages of the Second World War, and inescapably the Holocaust. Pictorially, they operate almost like scorched casements in a burnt-out building. This is especially true of *Safeguarding of Life*, which also contains the illustrations of theatre evacuations taken from Freeman's book. Coming after the visually frenetic *Die Gute Alte Zeit*, these calm but disquieting images call to mind the words of Graham Sutherland when describing his experiences as an Official War Artist in the City of London:

I will never forget those extraordinary first encounters: the silence, the absolute dead silence, except every now and then a thin tinkle of falling glass - a noise which reminded me of the music of Debussy. ... Everywhere there was a terrible stench - perhaps of burnt dirt; and always the silence.<sup>338</sup>

## Conclusion

The prints Kitaj made with Kelpa reveal a supremely confident artist, who was prepared to open out his ideas to a trusted collaborator. They are also amongst the most effective rebuttals to the charge that Kitaj was a literary artist (whatever that

<sup>337</sup> Kinsman, *The Prints of RB Kitaj*, 54.

<sup>338</sup> Roberto Tassi, *Sutherland: The Wartime Drawings* (London: Sotheby Parke Bernet, 1980), 19.

term really means) for there is no storytelling or anecdote in any of these images: they convey their meaning entirely by the most dazzling visual invention.

Equally, they present an image of Kitaj rather different from the one the artist himself liked to present in later years. This artist is engaged with the leading technical developments, he is a conscious participator in contemporary artistic debate on both sides of the Atlantic, he is collaborative, though without relinquishing authorial control, and he is formally experimental to an extent he would never repeat. His involvement with screenprinting was sustained over many years, until well into his life drawing period. Indeed, *Red Dancer of Moscow*, one of Kitaj's last montaged Kelpra prints and a personal favourite of his, was made in 1975, the year he began work on *If Not, Not*. Kitaj may have come to regret the experimental nature of these works but the fact that he continued to make striking images in screenprint, like *Red Dancer of Moscow*, suggests that the possibilities of the medium continued to fire his creativity in spite of his changing artistic priorities.

Why did Kitaj reject such a significant body of work? His changing sense of himself as an artist ultimately lay behind this decision. By the mid-70s, Kitaj had embarked on his renewed interest in life-drawing, which found a polemical outlet in the exhibition *The Human Clay* at the Hayward Gallery in 1976. This now legendary show was the result of the year he had spent as a guest buyer for the Arts Council Collection, a role he had agreed to with the rider that he 'would only buy drawings'.<sup>339</sup> The result was a curious mix of mature work by people such as Auerbach, who were committed to figurative drawing, and student work by others, such as Richard Hamilton, who had embarked on more experimental careers. The catalogue essay was Kitaj's apologia for both the work he selected and his own

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<sup>339</sup> Kitaj, *The Human Clay*, unpaginated.

conviction that drawing the figure was the foundation of art. It also boldly announced the existence of the School of London to the world, providing a bone for critics and art historians to chew over ever since.

This period was a watershed for Kitaj. From then on he is Kitaj the draughtsman following in the footsteps first of Degas, then of Cezanne, and equally he is Kitaj the painter – not printmaker, certainly not collaborative screenprinter, at any rate. The work made with Kelpra is seen as modernist and, one might say, therefore, aberrant. He makes this quite clear in a letter to Carol Hogben of the V&A's Circulation Department. Hogben's part of the correspondence does not survive but judging from Kitaj's response, he had written to suggest an exhibition of the screenprints, drawn wholly or in part from the V&A's collection, at the Hayward Art Gallery. Kitaj's reply begins by explaining how busy he is, listing various professional and personal projects which are eating away at his time, including acting as buyer for the Arts Council and building work at home. These, he says, are reason enough to turn down the proposal

but the most compelling sense which I must satisfy lies elsewhere:

Since about one year ago my working life has moved into hopeful changes ... not unrelated to a general and societal malaise which has always moved me. Drawing the figure again and rethinking many questions have lain at the heart of a direction which has included drawing lithographs and etchings.<sup>340</sup>

Which is reasonable enough, perhaps, but he expands on this, making it absolutely clear why an exhibition of these particular works is not acceptable to him.

But my very identity as an artist is bound up with ... an insistence now that artists have always drawn the human figure and they always will, and that figure-inventions of real consequence will always remain possible in spite of modernist resistance. ... I cannot, at the moment, go into an important Hayward exhibition, and contradict the direction of this flow by showing only

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<sup>340</sup> RB Kitaj, letter to Carol Hogben, 8<sup>th</sup> April 1975. V&A, NAL, 86.WW.1, MSL/1985/33.

the modernist (collage) aspect of my work (many of which have been seen at the Hayward recently).<sup>341</sup>

As far as Kitaj was concerned, it is clear from this letter that the possibility of exhibiting the Kelpra work the year before *The Human Clay*, and at the same venue, could not be allowed to happen. Obviously, the screenprints challenged the image he wished to project. The possibility that these works might be ‘figure-inventions of real consequence’ is not entertained. However, the precedent had been set for the official Kitaj position on the Kelpra period and he was never to significantly deviate from it. He yielded to some extent around the time of the Tate retrospective, allowing the V&A to mount a small print exhibition concurrently – although, in the booklet accompanying the V&A show, curator Rosemary Miles refers to the artist’s ‘strong reservations, to the exhibiting of so much of his printed work’.<sup>342</sup> He also gave some support to Jane Kinsman, of the National Gallery of Australia, whose catalogue of the graphics was published the same year, by writing ‘afterwords’ to some of the prints. Nevertheless, this aspect of his work did not appear in any of the major museum retrospectives held during his lifetime: not the Hirshhorn in 1981, not Düsseldorf in 1982, and not the Tate in 1994.

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<sup>341</sup> Kitaj to Hogben, V&A, NAL, 86.WW.1, MSL/1985/33.

<sup>342</sup> Miles, *Kitaj: A Print Retrospective*, unpaginated.

## Chapter 4

### LIVES OF THE ENGINEERS

In the 1960s, in Britain, technology was seen exactly as the force for progress. This was a view given expression at the highest political level. Harold Wilson's speech to the 1963 Labour Party conference in Scarborough proposed a modernising Socialism based on 'the scientific revolution' and went on to say:

The Britain that is going to be forged in the white heat of this revolution will be no place for restrictive practices or outdated methods...<sup>343</sup>

Appropriately, perhaps, the language is of the blast furnace and the steel works – the crucible of technological modernity, in other words. As I aim to show in this chapter, Kitaj would himself appropriate the imagery of the blast furnace to stand for a darker vision of the modern world.

In the early 1960s, screenprinting was a comparatively new medium for artists – it was new technology, in other words. As I have shown, Kitaj initially embraced it whole-heartedly but subsequently had reservations both about the medium and the work he made with it. I would like, now, to elaborate on his interest in technology and, inter alia, his tendency to demote or edit-out work he no longer approved of, by considering an episode that has been reduced to a footnote at best in almost all accounts of his career. This is the project he undertook, between 1969 and 1970, for Los Angeles County Museum of Art's (LACMA) Art & Technology programme at the Burbank factory of the major Californian aerospace company, Lockheed Martin. In its iconography this body of work shows more clearly than any other aspect of his oeuvre Kitaj's fascination with the Industrial Revolution as the detonation point of

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<sup>343</sup> Dominic Sandbrook, *White Heat: The History of Britain in the Swinging Sixties* (London: Little, Brown, 2006; paperback Abacus, 2007, reprinted 2008), 4.

modernity. Moreover, it draws on unfamiliar sources (as far as the current literature is concerned) such as the literature of engineering and, in particular, on the groundbreaking work of the art historian Francis Donald Klingender, whose *Art and the Industrial Revolution*, I aim to show, informed not only the *Art & Technology* project itself but Kitaj's subsequent work as late as the 1980s. Indeed, a concern with technology and its contribution to the dehumanising impact of modernity informs much of the artist's output from the mid-1960s until the 1990s.

To give some idea of just how thoroughly the work Kitaj made for the Art & Technology programme has been airbrushed from the record, we need only search the major monographs and catalogues for mention of it. First of all, apart from LACMA's own *A Report on the Art and Technology Program of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art: 1967-1971*, no publication on Kitaj to date has illustrated any of the pieces he made.<sup>344</sup> It is certainly referred to in the catalogue to the 1983 Hirshhorn retrospective exhibition catalogue. In his essay, Joe Shannon talks about it briefly, but with little explanation, simply describing it as 'the conceptual Lives of the Engineers series'<sup>345</sup> and the catalogue's Chronology entry for 1969 baldly states that he was 'working on a project for the *Art & Technology* exhibition at Los Angeles County Museum of Art'.<sup>346</sup> Richard Morphet, writing in the Tate Retrospective catalogue, refers to the project, again almost in passing, in his introductory essay.

At the end of the decade, Kitaj made a small number of sculptures in connection with the Art & Technology project of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. Like some of his prints, which similarly fall outside the scope of the present exhibition, these are notable for the directness with which they

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<sup>344</sup> A version of this chapter was published in January 2014 which did illustrate some of the surviving works from this period. See Francis Marshall, 'Lives of the Engineers: Visualizations of the Industrial Revolution in the Work of R.B. Kitaj', *Visual Culture in Britain*, 2014, vol 15, no 1, 50-68.

<sup>345</sup> Shannon, *Kitaj: Paintings, Drawings, Pastels*, 19.

<sup>346</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.



re-present, in another medium, single images drawn from the culture of another period.<sup>347</sup>

Morphet, however, does not explain why they fall outside the scope of the exhibition but I think it is safe to say it is due to Kitaj self-editing his output. The book's chronology says nothing of Art & Technology but, significantly, informs us that in 1970 he 'taught life drawing for a year at UCLA.'<sup>348</sup> Andrew Lambirth's 2005 monograph, *Kitaj* has nothing to say on the subject of Art & Technology. Indeed, according to Lambirth, as far as Kitaj was concerned 1969 was:

... a bad period for his art, and Kitaj concentrated too heavily on screenprinting, work which he now considers peripheral to his central achievement in painting.<sup>349</sup>

Marco Livingstone mentions the project fleetingly in each of the four editions of his monograph but, rather like Lambirth, he skates over the years 1969-71 as the period when Kitaj 'committed [his] most extreme acts of ordinary modernism'.<sup>350</sup> He expands on this, fractionally, in a footnote, by explaining that four of the Lockheed works were illustrated in the 1970 Marlborough catalogue *Pictures from an Exhibition*.<sup>351</sup> This, however, is not quite correct: a total of seven pieces are illustrated in the catalogue. James Aulich and John Lynch in *Critical Kitaj* (still the most analytical English publication on the artist) refer to the Art and Technology Program but again only briefly and without expanding on the exact nature of Kitaj's contribution. Aulich does, however, make a significant connection between Kitaj's work and contemporary culture.

... the installation bore more than a passing relationship to notions of heroic materialism and to the memories of the great engineers and philanthropists of

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<sup>347</sup> Morphet, *RB Kitaj: A Retrospective*, p16.

<sup>348</sup> Ibid., 61.

<sup>349</sup> Lambirth, *Kitaj*, 36.

<sup>350</sup> Livingstone, *RB Kitaj*, 26.

<sup>351</sup> Ibid., 44, footnote 45.

the industrial revolution. Tellingly, Kenneth Clark had offered these self-same people as a palliative to the modern condition in his popular television series *Civilization*, first broadcast in spring 1969.<sup>352</sup>

Only Jane Kinsman, in *The Prints of RB Kitaj*, makes more than a glancing reference to the *Art & Technology* project but, inevitably, specifically within the context of the graphic work, in particular the sheets from the Robert Creeley collaboration, *A Day Book*.<sup>353</sup> She does not, however, discuss the full extent of Kitaj's work at Lockheed, even going so far as to write:

Aside from [the Creeley prints], there was very little to show from the exercise at Lockheed except the experience itself and its lasting effects on the artist.<sup>354</sup>

What it seems she means by 'lasting effects' is that Lockheed helped reinforce Kitaj's antipathy to 'high-tec' art. Marilyn McCully's catalogue to the 2011 Abbot Hall, Kendal, exhibition *Kitaj: Portraits and Reflections*, the first monographic show since his death and thus, in theory, free of his direct influence, does not refer to the *Art & Technology* project either. Nor, for that matter, does Eckhart Gillen's *Obsessions*, the book published to accompany what was otherwise the most thorough Kitaj retrospective exhibition yet mounted, which opened at the Jewish Museum, Berlin in 2013. As we shall see, given the geographic location of the venue, there is some irony in its omission of the *Art & Technology* project. I could go on but the point should by now be clear, that time and again we are led to believe, by Kitaj and his commentators both, that towards the end of the 1960s he did little of any lasting value, in any medium.

Kitaj's reluctance to have the results of his time at Lockheed dissected and displayed is, perhaps, understandable for it was a genuinely experimental foray for him. Yet the

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<sup>352</sup> Aulich and Lynch, *Critical Kitaj*, 155.

<sup>353</sup> Kinsman, *The Prints of RB Kitaj*, 74.

<sup>354</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.

objects he made there include some of the strangest, most tantalizing images of his career, mainly because he allowed himself at this point to be pushed outside his comfort zone into areas that tested his capacities not just technically but imaginatively. After all, at this stage in his career he was a well established artist, exhibiting internationally, with a major dealer behind him, and a significant, readily identifiable body of work to his name, but here he was, not just in an unfamiliar environment – an aircraft manufacturer developing the latest, most advanced of passenger jetliners, the Lockheed L-1011 Tristar, and the most advanced military aircraft, the SR-71 Blackbird – but in an utterly unfamiliar guise: as sculptor and installation artist (fig. 53).

### Art and Technology

The *Art and Technology* programme was the brainchild of LACMA's Chief Curator, Maurice Tuchman, who was also the organiser of Kitaj's first major museum exhibition, in Los Angeles, in 1965. During the course of an interview published in the catalogue to that earlier show, Tuchman asked Kitaj, 'What, ideally, would you wish art to do?' To which the artist's response was:

I would like it to *do* research. I would like it to get a job. I would like it to *do* more useful tasks than it's been doing. I would like it to subvert the outstanding prescriptions for what it ought to be.

I don't like the smell of art for art's sake. I'm guilty of many of art's sins.<sup>355</sup>

Given Kitaj's fascination with histories of Modernism, the ideal of art having a job chimes with the programmes of some early-20<sup>th</sup> century artists, such as the Russian Suprematists (whose work informs his early screenprints and paintings) who believed art should have a direct social application. In this context, one thinks of El Lissitzky's

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<sup>355</sup> Tuchman, *RB Kitaj*, unpaginated.

concept of *das zielbewußte Schaffen*, the ‘goal-oriented creation’. Tuchman was also interested in the ideas of the early Modernists and, in one sense at least, took Kitaj at his word by inviting him shortly afterwards to take part in a project that placed artists in industry. Over the past forty years this has become commonplace but in the late-sixties it was still something of a novelty.

Writing in the introduction to the programme report, he explained the genesis of the scheme.

In 1966, when Art and Technology was first conceived, I had been living in Southern California for two years. A newcomer to this region is particularly sensitive to the futuristic character of Los Angeles, especially as it is manifested in advanced technology. I thought of the typical Coastal industries as chiefly aerospace oriented (Jet Propulsion Laboratory, Lockheed Aircraft); or geared toward scientific research (The Rand Corporation, TRW Systems); or connected with the vast cinema and TV industry in Southern California (Universal Film Studios).<sup>356</sup>

This, then, is the environment in which Kitaj himself had been living, on and off, for about two years, since he first took up his post as Instructor in the Art Department at the University of California, Berkeley, in 1967. In other words, the immediate background to the *Mahler Becomes Politics*, *Beisbol* screenprint series was not mittel Europa (unless one of the mind – an idea of Europe, in other words) or even ‘olde London town’ as Kitaj called it but a ‘futuristic’ city devoted to what were then arguably the three most technologically significant industries of the age: aviation, scientific research and the movies.<sup>357</sup>

For Tuchman, it sparked the idea of placing artists within these industries, inspired by the utopian ideas (albeit largely unrealised) of the Italian Futurists, Russian

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<sup>356</sup> Maurice Tuchman, *A Report on the Art and Technology Program of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art: 1967-1971* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1971), 9.

<sup>357</sup> RB Kitaj, letter to Chris Prater, undated. Pallant House, Kitaj Archive, letter 18.

Constructivists and the Bauhaus artists who also aimed at a fusion of art and industry.<sup>358</sup> His stated aim was not primarily an exhibition but

... to observe a potentially vital reciprocal process ... I believed that it was the process of interchange between artist and company that was potentially most significant, rather than whatever tangible results might quickly occur.<sup>359</sup>

Despite his initial doubts about whether either major artists or major corporations would want to take part in such a scheme, he nevertheless managed to persuade thirty-seven companies to take part. Amongst the artists participating in the programme besides Kitaj were Jean Dubuffet, Roy Lichtenstein, Eduardo Paolozzi, Robert Rauschenberg, Richard Serra, Andy Warhol, and Victor Vasarely. In fact, Tuchman had suggested Kitaj get involved in the programme as early as 1967, presumably shortly after he arrived to take up his post at Berkeley. Surprisingly, given the anti-technological attitudes to be found in many of his later public statements, the artist was immediately enthusiastic. Perhaps, though, we should not be so surprised, for the Kitaj of this period was less antagonistic to technology than he would later claim to be. In late sixties California, for instance, he preferred driving to walking, as his first wife Elsi revealed in a letter to Michael Hamburger. Contrast Elsi's Californian vignette:

We have at least managed to find a charming, extremely spacious house close to good local schools for the children and also within walking distance of the university. But Ron still likes to drive – about a six minute drive – because he hates walking anywhere.<sup>360</sup>

with Kitaj's curmudgeonly dismissal of technology from 1994:

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<sup>358</sup> Tuchman, *A Report on the Art and Technology Program*, 9.

<sup>359</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>360</sup> Elsi Kitaj, letter to Michael Hamburger, dated (postmark) 26 August 1967. Leeds University, Michael Hamburger Archive.

I'm not a technically minded man, I don't even like to drive a car.<sup>361</sup>

There was one further detail which may have piqued his interest in the project and that was the title of the programme – *Art & Technology* – for Kitaj had long been interested in the history of the Industrial Revolution, another aspect of his work glossed over in subsequent literature. For instance, he collected 19<sup>th</sup> century prints and photographs of industrial landscapes, and he owned a first-edition copy of Francis D Klingender's ground-breaking book *Art and the Industrial Revolution*, the title of which clearly has echoes in the name of Tuchman's project.<sup>362</sup> British, though German born, a Marxist, and the son of an academic animal painter, Klingender (1907-1955) studied Sociology at the London School of Economics and was one of the first English language academics to be concerned with the social history of art. *Art and the Industrial Revolution*, first published in 1947, studied the effects of industrialisation on the fine arts in England. A revised and edited version, which softened the Marxist content, was produced in 1968.<sup>363</sup> Kitaj, though, was aware of Klingender before then and, in any case, owned the first edition.<sup>364</sup> As I will show, Klingender's book was to have a significant impact on the work Kitaj produced for LACMA and beyond.

In search of a suitable placement, Kitaj toured Lockheed's Rye Canyon and Burbank factories with fellow artist Robert Irwin. The outcome was that the Burbank site suited his purposes better because he was primarily interested in 'industrial fabricating techniques' such as the vacuum formed plastics it manufactured.<sup>365</sup> Rye Canyon, on the other hand, specialised in theoretical research. Clearly, we are dealing

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<sup>361</sup> Kinsman, *The Prints of RB Kitaj*, 121.

<sup>362</sup> Tuchman, *A Report on the Art and Technology Program*, 149.

<sup>363</sup> Retrieved 27.10.2011 from <http://www.dictionaryofarthistorians.org.uk/klingenderf.htm>

<sup>364</sup> Kitaj's copy of the book is in the author's possession.

<sup>365</sup> Tuchman, *A Report on the Art and Technology Program*, 127.

with a very different artist to the man who, in response to an enquiry about art's plastic imperatives, responded tartly:

I only have two plastic imperatives: I don't like plastic and I don't like imperatives.<sup>366</sup>

At the back of the Report, all of the participating organisations have their logos and a descriptive blurb. Here we are told that 'Lockheed Aircraft Corporation, the nation's number one Department of Defense contractor, has long been a leader in military aircraft'. Amongst its products is the C-5A 'the world's largest aircraft' and amongst other things it is developing anti-submarine aircraft, 'researches new materials, and does solar research for NASA'<sup>367</sup>. We are, clearly, a very long way indeed from the sleepy Old World of the Warburg Journals, Cecil Court bookshops and *Third Man* Vienna. One might expect a Left-leaning American artist lecturing at Berkeley in the late-sixties to have reservations about mixing with such an organization. Let us not forget that, at the same time, the Vietnam War was at its height, student unrest was common across the USA and Europe, and San Francisco was the epicentre of counterculture ideas. And yet, although he later complained about Lockheed, his issues appear to have been exclusively with the bureaucracy of the company and not with its links to the military.

Kitaj had a firm idea of what he would like to do right from the start and this was to realise in three-dimensions an idea he had long been thinking about for a painting: the depiction of an imaginary artist's studio inspired by 'the kind of grey, haze-like, dull daylight, Bohemian, urban atmosphere you see in photos of places like studios in the old days ... Medardo Rosso's studio .... Brancusi's studio .... that sort of thing.'

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<sup>366</sup> Morphet, *RB Kitaj: A Retrospective*, 47.

<sup>367</sup> Tuchman, *A Report on the Art and Technology Program*, 374.

He outlined his plan in a letter to Don Christiansen of Lockheed's Public Affairs office:

Among the few themes I have wanted to return to throughout the years, an attraction remains with me for those occasions, those contexts (in real life) where what I would like to call a modernist presence has taken shape, is finding, pursuing form, germinating.<sup>368</sup>

Once again, as with the screenprints, Modernism is invoked as a catalyst for his own work, one of the 'few themes' he has wanted to return to. He quickly grew bored of this scheme, chiefly because he was more interested in creating his own work rather than imagining the output of a fictional artist. Nevertheless, an essence of the original idea remained within the final result, which was a complex mixed-media installation entitled *Mock Up: Lives of the Engineers*, a reference to Samuel Smiles' multi-volume work on British engineers published in 1904.<sup>369 370</sup> Much of this material is now largely lost and the only significant documentation of it currently available is to be found in Tuchman's *Art & Technology Programme Report*, published in 1970. However, there is just about enough of this, together with other references in archives and Marlborough exhibition catalogues, as well as surviving elements of the work in question, to attempt to recreate the installation and to make some form of tentative analysis.

### Mock Up: Lives of the Engineers

The following reconstruction and subsequent reading of Kitaj's LACMA installation is, by its very nature, speculative, primarily because it is largely based on photographs and the only literature available is Tuchman's *Report*. Still, some attempt to analyse

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<sup>368</sup> Kitaj, letter to Don Christiansen, September 1968, in Tuchman, *A Report on the Art and Technology Program*, 148.

<sup>369</sup> Tuchman, *A Report on the Art and Technology Program*, 162.

<sup>370</sup> Samuel Smiles (1812-1904) Scottish author and campaigner for political reform.



at least the nature of Kitaj's contribution to this scheme needs to be made. My main aim here is not to so much to assess the work itself as to map out Kitaj's thinking, both at the time he made it and subsequently for I believe some ideas stimulated by the project were to surface in his later work, albeit in a very different form.

Because this material is so little known, I will give a broad overview of what Kitaj actually made for Art & Technology before I discuss it in detail. First of all, it is necessary to understand that what he created was a series of two- and three-dimensional elements which, when exhibited together, formed an installation. This was given the overall title *Mock Up: Lives of the Engineers*, though the various elements were individually titled. Nevertheless, Kitaj was clear that the ensemble was more than just the sum of its parts: he had a firm idea of how it should be seen and, in a three page text, described the installation in some detail. This text begins with the following overview:

A room full of things and fragments of things mostly made or mostly relating to things made in the mock-up shops at Lockheed while the very craftsmen were also working on the model parts for their new 1011 passenger liner...

(working men moving back and forth as in film

(Rene Claire etc ... precision/confusion

the room space shd [sic] be introduced by the large black arch (which may yet have to be completed by addition of: (white) viaduct\* cut-out strip design; various stencilled wording\*; and one of the variant (red?) sets of wooden inner doorway pieces creating an unorthodox entrance space...

\*with tiny puffing train image? or people

\*SELF-HELP; THRIFT; DUTY etc re: Sam Smiles<sup>371</sup>

So far as I can reconstruct them, the chief elements were: *Our Thing*, a plaster sculpture of a lighthouse under construction (fig. 54); *Coal Mine*, a diorama of the interior of mine (fig. 55); *Chelsea Reach*, a textile geometric abstraction in the manner of Mondrian or de Stijl (fig. 59); a number of low-relief wall-mounted plaques, or ‘medallions’; at least three large, free-standing ‘chimneys’ one of which was surmounted by a figure, *The Flying Man* (fig. 65); at least one arch sometimes called a ‘viaduct’ by Kitaj (fig. 61); a book of photographs entitled *Wings (Recent Sculpture and Buildings)*; a series of photographic blow-ups of images not used in *Wings*; a number of computer-graphic prints (fig. 62 and 66); and, finally, a number of screenprints of book covers, which probably later found their way into the extensive series *In Our Time*. There are almost certainly some lesser elements I have missed but this gives a good idea of the complexity of the installation. All of this was made within the space of about a year to eighteen months and, in all likelihood, in short creative bursts. Simultaneously, he was working on the print series *Struggle in the West* and *Some Poets*, as well as putting the finishing touches to paintings such as *Synchromy with FB – General of Hot Desire*. As next to none of this material has been discussed or otherwise published since the *Art & Technology Project Report* of 1971, analysing it presents certain problems. Even the whereabouts of these pieces is no longer always clear.<sup>372</sup> I will, therefore, reserve my remarks for the larger single components. My aim is to try to draw out Kitaj’s sources, to tease out the afterlife of the imagery, and to consider his attitude to the Art & Technology period for, as is so often the case, it is not quite consistent.

<sup>371</sup> Kitaj, RB, *Mock-Up; Lives of the Engineers*, unpublished manuscript, c1969, UCLA, RB Kitaj Papers (Collection 1741), Box 119, Folder 20.

<sup>372</sup> When asked, Marlborough Fine Art claimed to have no knowledge whatsoever of the whereabouts of the surviving elements of *Lives of the Engineers*. Conversation with Geoffrey Parton, 2013.

## Our Thing

*Our Thing* is a plaster and mixed-media construction consisting of a bell-shaped structure representing the lower part of a lighthouse, surmounted by a simple wooden crane secured by ropes. Alongside, and connected with it by a rope bridge, is a tripod platform with a boxlike superstructure. The accompanying illustration in the *Art & Technology* catalogue shows a small figure crossing the bridge. The sculpture is more or less a direct three-dimensional transcription of a line illustration reproduced in *British Engineers* by Metius Chappell, showing a lighthouse under construction.<sup>373</sup> With regard to the title, although *Our Thing* could be a hint at the Mafia, an organisation known to its adherents as *Cosa Nostra* (Italian: Our Thing), it may just as easily refer to the Isley Brothers' album, *It's Our Thing*, released on 16<sup>th</sup> February 1969.

The illustration in Chappell reproduces an engraving, taken from Robert Stephenson's *An Account of the Bell Rock Lighthouse* of 1824, entitled *The State of the Works in August 1809*. The flared outline of the lighthouse can be seen in one of the pastel drawings Kitaj made at this time and which is reproduced in the *Art & Technology Report* (fig. 77).<sup>374</sup> According to the *Report*, Kitaj liked the ambiguity of this piece, the sense of industrial activity around a structure that is hard to identify (although it is not clear whether he means the engraving or his sculpture). It may be that the visual similarities between lighthouses and chimneys (symbols of industry evoked elsewhere in the installation) were at the back of his mind when creating *Our Thing*.

Published in 1942, the height of the Second World War, Chappell's slim book is a general introduction to the subject aimed very much at the layman. In his

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<sup>373</sup> Metius Chappell, *British Engineers*, 29.

<sup>374</sup> Tuchman, *A Report on the Art & Technology Programme*, 152.

introduction, after briefly sketching in how economics and engineering help underpin a civilisation, Chappell makes the following observation:

This proposition may seem obvious, but it is nevertheless important for a true understanding both of the works of the engineers of the past and of the part which the engineers of the future will be called upon to play in the reconstruction of English civilisation after the war.<sup>375</sup>

*British Engineers* is intended to subtly reinforce a sense of the continuity of English civilisation – the illustration at the head of the page from which the previous quote is taken is of Stonehenge. It was one a series of books published by Collins under the general heading *Britain in Pictures: The British People in Pictures*, the aim of which, very consciously, was to instil a sense of nationhood and national values at a time when the British way of life was under real threat. And that big word civilisation appears not only on the first but the last of the book's forty-eight pages, as Chappell draws to a close with this vague but enchanting vision:

Whatever its form, however, the civilisation of the future will present the civil engineer with many problems which will be solved with the aid of increasing knowledge and yet more wonderful materials.<sup>376</sup>

1942 was obviously not the year for publicly expressing reservations. The series was published throughout the war until 1948. It is impossible to say for certain why Kitaj picked up this book, although the subtlety of its design would surely have appealed to him as a lifelong bibliophile. Indeed, *The Britain in Pictures* series is still sought after by collectors. Their covers are beautiful examples of mid-20<sup>th</sup> century British graphic design: simple, Modernist, a standard format across the series, but each volume bearing an appropriate illustration in a roundel. Certainly they would have provided ideal material for the *In Our Time* print series. Equally appealing must have been the subject matter for, as Tuchman has pointed out, Kitaj was deeply interested

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<sup>375</sup> Chappell, *British Engineers*, 7.

<sup>376</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

in the industrial revolution. In any case, the illustrations contained in *British Engineers* obviously made a deep enough impression for Kitaj to want to respond to them in his own work.

The artist's subsequent attitude to his own sculpture is telling and corresponds to the one he showed towards his screenprints. In 1975, Kitaj offered *Our Thing* to the Tate Gallery as a gift. But this was not the first time he had proposed donating items from the *Art & Technology* scheme to the gallery. The 1975 correspondence preserved in the Tate Archive reveals that earlier, in 1972, he had suggested they accept as a gift two sculptures, *Our Thing* and *Coal Mine*, on condition that the Tate paid the transport from California, where they were in store. This, along with 'aesthetic grounds' proved an impediment for the gallery and the proposal was turned down.<sup>377</sup>

Tate curator Richard Morphet outlines the fresh offer in a memo to then director, Norman Reid, adding at the end:

If it were a work of art it would in my view be quite interesting, but to my surprise the artist tells us it is not, but is merely documentary material.<sup>378</sup>

Reid's baffled response to this piece of information is scrawled across the bottom of the memo.

Documentary for what? Unusual surely for an artist to claim that [his?] work is not art!

Earlier Morphet had dispatched assistant curator David Brown to discuss the piece with Kitaj. Brown's notes of this conversation, which was conducted over the phone, are also preserved in the Tate Archive. One gets a sense of Brown scribbling as Kitaj talked:

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<sup>377</sup> Richard Morphet, memo to David Brown, 29 October 1975. Tate acquisition file TG 4/2/567/1.

<sup>378</sup> Richard Morphet, memo to Norman Reid, 30 October 1975. Tate acquisition file TG 4/2/567/1.

More documentary than art.

Work of art – probably not – documentary.

Touched for moment by making objects – persuaded to do things in context of exhibition.

Thinks about Degas not Duchamp.

It has to be said that the tone of his writing around the time he was making *Our Thing* does not suggest the reluctance that ‘persuaded to do things’ implies. Indeed, his notes of the time crackle with enthusiasm, as his writing always does when he is really engaged. But by 1975, Kitaj was focused on his return to figuration, which would culminate in the *Human Clay* exhibition and one can see why he might want to demote these rickety constructions to ‘documentary’ status even as he offers them to the Tate Gallery. That phrase ‘thinks about Degas not Duchamp’ is significant, here. Is it likely that he did not really think of them as art, in the way he did think of his painting? Certainly, he always considered painting the most important part of his work. That did not change suddenly in 1976. Writing in 1970, for instance, German art historian and curator, Wieland Schmied relates how:

Ich fragte ihn, was ihm wichtiger wäre: seine Malerei oder seine Graphik. Er antwortete, als wäre das gar keine Frage, die Malerei. Die Drucke entstünden in den Pausen, wenn er nicht malte.<sup>379</sup>

Equally, once one begins to understand the scheme in its entirety, it becomes clear that the sculptures are not strictly independent pieces: they are fragments of a whole, even if they seem complete in themselves. So, when he told David Brown they were documentary, in a sense he may not have been entirely disingenuous: the objects

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<sup>379</sup> ‘I asked him what is most important: painting or printmaking. He answered: without question, painting. Printmaking was what he did in the breaks, when he wasn’t painting.’ Wieland Schmied, *RB Kitaj* (Rotterdam: Museum Boymans-Van Beuningen, 1970), unpaginated.

could be seen as residual components, rather than the art itself. We are today used to the idea of presenting documentation in lieu of the actual work of art – for instance in the case of performance – although such an approach would have been unlikely to appeal to the increasingly conservative Kitaj. In addition to which, it seems from the material in the Tate Archive that he was not giving a complete explanation of their significance, what they mean and what they are about.

The point is, I find it hard to imagine that an artist as serious-minded as Kitaj would have wasted so much time and energy on something so large in scale and ambition if he thought of it as just ‘documentary’. Indeed, he still thought enough of this material to offer it to Tate not once but twice. And, on further analysis, things here take an even more curious turn. As we have seen, Kitaj offered the gallery *Our Thing* and *Coal Mine* back in 1972 – and the documentation still extant in the Tate Archive is quite clear on this. As Tate refused them, both objects were then offered to European galleries. In a note to David Brown from 1976, an understandably confused Morphet writes

But Tony Reichardt assured me yesterday that both the sculptures that were turned down by the Tate in 1972 were subsequently presented to German museums. On the face of it therefore it sounds as though there are two versions of this lighthouse piece.<sup>380</sup>

It is absolutely certain that one of the pieces went to a German museum. In 1973, the Neue Nationalgalerie, the Mies van der Rohe designed modern art gallery in the heart of West Berlin, acquired *Our Thing* (Inventory-No. NG 1/73). And there it remains to this day, hence the irony of it not even being referred to in *Obsessions*, the Berlin Jewish Museum’s Kitaj retrospective of 2013. Also in 1973, the Museum Boijmans van Beuningen, Rotterdam, acquired *Coal Mine* (accession number: BEK 1505

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<sup>380</sup> Memo from Richard Morphet to David Brown, dated 29 Oct 1975. Tate Acquisition File TG 4/2/567/1.

(MK)). Which means Morphet was correct, Kitaj must have made two versions of *Our Thing* – if it was in Berlin in 1973, how could he otherwise have offered it to Tate in 1976?<sup>381</sup>

### Coal Mine

The sculpture now in Rotterdam – called *Coal Mine* by Kitaj and *The Tunnel* by the Dutch – is a mixed-media construction comprised, amongst other things, of painted plaster and cat-gut strands. *Coal Mine* is in the form of a diorama, a boxed, three-dimensional reconstruction. The box is open at one end and, painted around the front edge, are moralistic epigrams from Samuel Smiles, author of *Lives of the Engineers*, probably from *Self-help*. On looking into the diorama, viewers encounter a railway track, with coal truck, running through a rough-hewn tunnel towards flickering flames at the rear. In the roof of the tunnel is a hole through which light shines.

According to Tuchman, it is based on a coloured lithograph of 1837 called *Interior of Kilsby Tunnel* by John Cooke Bourne (fig. 56), which shows workmen and ponies in an otherwise dark, waterlogged tunnel, illuminated by a dramatic column of light penetrating an aperture in the roof. This is one of a number of prints and drawing reproduced in Klingender illustrating mine interiors and the construction of railway tunnels. In fact there is a whole section in *Art & The Industrial Revolution* devoted to the railway, which may have significance for Kitaj's work, given the recurrence of rail imagery throughout his oeuvre, especially in the 1960s.

Kitaj was keen to replicate the effulgent, almost supernatural light column of Bourne's watercolour but, apparently, this proved difficult at first. According to

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<sup>381</sup> The whereabouts of the 1975 version of *Our Thing* remains a mystery. Neither the Kitaj Estate nor Marlborough Fine Art seem to know anything about it.



Tuchman, it was one of the Lockheed technicians, William Stullick, who solved the problem by stringing a cone of fishing wire from the roof to the floor of the tunnel.<sup>382</sup>

When the internal light source was switched on the strands were illuminated, simulating the effect of a shaft of light penetrating a large, gloomy cavern. This may well have been no more than just a solution to a problem. However, formally it calls to mind the stringed figures of Henry Moore and Barbara Hepworth or even the Perspex and nylon structures of Naum Gabo. The similarity may be coincidental but it cannot have skipped Kitaj's attention. One imagines him smiling to himself when he first saw the thing illuminated. As he did with the screenprints, Kitaj relied on the specialist skills of others to realise his ideas. At Burbank this meant a group of technicians. Kitaj's warm regard for these men also prompts some of his typically lyrical Romanticism:

I felt very much at home and warmed up and on their side in no time at all ... old Bolshevik merchant mariner sentiments welled up and a hundred daily dramas played themselves out like an anthology of Proletarian literature brought up to date [...] I won't forget them in that stinking suburban valley and hope they get out into those National Parks a lot.<sup>383</sup>

The flames at back of tunnel are simulated by a backlight and paper, again calling to mind Marcel Duchamp's *Etant Donnés* (1944-66), where backlighting is used to create the illusion of a sparkling waterfall.<sup>384</sup> As Kitaj was in the USA in 1969, it is quite possible that he had seen the Duchamp installation and even if he had not, then surely he knew of it. After all, the unveiling of *Etant Donnés* was a significant event that saw Duchamp breaking his artistic silence with a major work after years supposedly devoted to chess. When Kitaj told David Brown that he 'thinks about

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<sup>382</sup> Tuchman, *A Report on the Art & Technology Programme*, 158.

<sup>383</sup> Ibid., 158.

<sup>384</sup> Duchamp worked on the installation from 1946 until 1966. It was given according to his wish to the Philadelphia Museum of Art and first displayed there in June 1969. See Calvin Tomkins, *Marcel Duchamp* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1997), 451.

Degas not Duchamp' it may well be that he had *Etant Donnés* specifically in mind when he was making *Our Thing*, rather than the readymades.

One further source for this particular piece may well have been 'a full-size labyrinthine coal mine reconstruction – a favourite visiting place of his young son' which was housed in the Science Museum, London.<sup>385</sup> Such an immersive museum display could well have informed the idea behind the entire *Lives of the Engineers* installation. Almost certainly, at least some of the Science Museum's collections fed into the genesis of Kitaj's work not just in the 1960s but into the 1970s as well.

Bourne's watercolour may have been one of the stimuli for Kitaj's piece; their similarities are obvious. But their differences are themselves suggestive. Kilsby Tunnel, in Bourne's work, is imagined as an awesome, cathedral-like space, its vastness emphasised by the column of light and the tiny figures it illuminates. Its closest relations in visual terms are Romanticism's visions of the Sublime, rather than the technical and social historical engravings to be found elsewhere in *Art and the Industrial Revolution*. Klingender himself draws the analogy between certain kinds of industrial imagery and the work of the painter John Martin, whose visions of Biblical catastrophe were enormously popular with Victorian audiences. In his book, Klingender reproduces Martin's *The Road to Hell*, which shows a huge cavern in endless perspective, along which runs a beam of light bearing the figure of Satan. But then, as Kenneth Clark points out, not only was the industrial revolution part of Romanticism but blast furnaces had inspired artist's visions of Hell from as early as Hieronymous Bosch in the late-15<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>386</sup> With this in mind, it would, perhaps,

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<sup>385</sup> Tuchman, *A Report on the Art & Technology Programme*, 150.

<sup>386</sup> Kenneth Clark, *Civilization* (London: John Murray, 1969; paperback edition, 2005), 229.

be conceivable to describe *Kilsby Tunnel* as an example of the Industrial Sublime.<sup>387</sup>

Kitaj's tunnel, in contrast, is a claustrophobic grotto with flames at the far end towards which the coal truck is heading. Indeed, there are other illustrations in Klingender that are visually much closer to Kitaj's piece than Bourne's lithograph. For instance, one extraordinary image in *Art and the Industrial Revolution* shows a figure seated on the floor next to railway-truck in a gloomy, oddly proportioned space, lit by a shaft of light from above. It recalls something by, perhaps, Goya, or could serve as an illustration to Kafka's story *Der Bau*. It is, though, *The Bottom of the Shaft, Walbottle Colliery*, an etching by TJ Hair, from his *Sketches of Coal Mines*. Indeed, this image is so much more like Kitaj's work that I am tempted to think that it, rather than *Kilsby Tunnel*, was the inspiration for the piece exhibited at LACMA. The two images are remarkably congruent: rocky interior, low ceiling, rail-wagon, shaft of light, murky atmosphere – only the figures are missing. Of course, it is possible, even likely that Bourne's lithograph, Hair's etching and Martin's painting all informed Kitaj's own work but, by talking about *Kilsby Tunnel*, he deftly deflected attention away from the more significant of his sources.

### Chelsea Reach

One of the results of the Lockheed experience was *Chelsea Reach (First Version)* (For JAMcNW). The implication of *First Version* is that there is or was a *Second Version* although it is not clear if this was ever made. However, in the *Art and Technology Report* Kitaj writes

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<sup>387</sup> *Kilsby Tunnel* of 1837, bears some resemblance to Martin's painting *The Coronation of Queen Victoria*, 1839. See <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/martin-the-coronation-of-queen-victoria-n05753> accessed 9.12.2015.

... there still remains the fact of either having or not having to deal with the 2<sup>nd</sup> set of (I believe – complete) fabric panels in, I think, a dark color range ... but I may dispose these on the walls in a certain way I have in mind.<sup>388</sup>

This suggests it was made or, at least, was close to completion at the time Kitaj was drawing up his final plan of the installation.

At first glance, judging by the few images published in catalogues, *Chelsea Reach* looks like an exercise in Mondrianesque modernist painting. The image is an austere geometric panel, consisting of a series of rectangles of varying dimensions and colours (probably shades of grey), separated by thin black lines. It is huge: at 244 x 458 cms it is close in scale to a mural. As I have shown, Kitaj had a deep interest in Modernism and used grids extensively throughout his work, although usually as a foil to figuration, never as an end in itself, as in this case. Though this is in itself unusual, the catalogue details reveal a bigger surprise, for it is not oil on canvas but fabric and wood. Each rectangle is actually a sample of the cloth used, or proposed, for the interior of a plane, the Lockheed L-1011 Tristar. The rectangles not only differ in hue but in texture, meaning *Chelsea Reach* must have had a subtly complex surface. The piece continues the structural use of geometric grids begun in late-1950s but this time makes the allusion to Mondrian and van Doesburg explicit. There is no figurative imagery here to distract from the purely formal aspects of the work. At the same time, the dedication ‘for J.A.McN.W.’ makes obvious reference to James Abbot McNeil Whistler, a painter heavily influenced by Japanese art, as well as being a pioneer of formalism and, like Kitaj, an American artist in London. The idea had been brewing for a while before Lockheed, in fact since arriving in Berkeley. Kitaj writes:

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<sup>388</sup> Tuchman, *A Report on the Art & Technology Programme*, 162.

I actually had begun to collect some strange fabrics, some ancient ones, old ones, and some that were really cruddy, that came out of poor situations... I just happened here to use aircraft fabrics, aircraft seating fabrics.<sup>389</sup>

Kitaj's explanation for this piece goes like this:

I got interested in fabrics and textiles when I was in Berkeley (in 1968)... I conceived of a large wall hanging or wall screen which would be completely abstract – rather decorative, and it would be a collection of fabrics arranged on the tatami principle – you know that you see on Japanese floors, divided by slatting and pinned down in that way so you see a wonderful sequential floor situation.<sup>390</sup>

Kitaj was doing something similar here to what Blinky Palermo would do in Germany shortly afterwards: using minimalism to explore the possibilities still open to painting, and using the same economy of means. Different fabrics are spliced together to make works that are not paintings, though they resemble them, and are not quite sculpture either. This places the work within a wider context of then current Minimalism.

Possibly, there is a sly dig here at the Minimalist sculptor Donald Judd, who had written rather less than favourably about Kitaj's first New York exhibition at the Marlborough-Gerson Gallery in 1965.<sup>391</sup> Judd's piece, ostensibly a review of Kitaj's show, is a laconic, almost bored demolition of British Pop art in general. His specific remarks about Kitaj are that:

Most of the work is only competent. It's weak if you look at it carefully and boring if you think about it.<sup>392</sup>

He concedes, however, that

The best things are the collages of photographs, advertisements and magazine covers, most old and not Pop now and often not Pop then.<sup>393</sup>

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<sup>389</sup> Tuchman, *A Report on the Art & Technology Programme*. 153.

<sup>390</sup> *Ibid.*, 153.

<sup>391</sup> Donald Judd, *Complete Writings 1959-75* (New York: New York University Press, 1975), 168.

<sup>392</sup> *Ibid.*, 168.

<sup>393</sup> *Ibid.*, 168.

Kitaj appears never to have taken criticism lying down, so the temptation to take someone on at his or her own game may have been irresistible. If it seems unlikely that Kitaj would do something like this, however obliquely, then one must bear in mind that the original idea he had of creating a sculptor's studio was, indeed, intended as a satirical comment on formalist sculpture and, even though this concept was dropped, the final installation still seems to have retained an ironic concern with the language of Minimalism.<sup>394</sup> This is not to suggest that the whole enterprise was an elaborate joke at Judd's expense, for it obviously had its roots deep within Kitaj's practice and artistic concerns.

On the other hand, even as late as 1981, Kitaj was capable of taking a swipe at Judd, as in the following exchange with Tim Hyman:

Hyman: But isn't there a sacrifice made in the recent work – aren't you getting much less in?

Kitaj: No way! You're not talking to the Rev. Donald Judd. You know me ... I always want to get *too* much in and one of the delicious consequences of our austere modernity is that one can be driven like a lunatic into a dream of amplitude...<sup>395</sup>

Although, he never made anything quite like it again (or anything like *Lives of the Engineers*, for that matter), Kitaj obviously took *Chelsea Reach* seriously, saying: 'I don't want to leave it just as a backdrop; I want it to be a piece in some light.'<sup>396</sup>

### Computer Drawings and Other Elements

The Lockheed project also included Kitaj's only foray into computer art. He was introduced to computer graphics by David Belson of Lockheed and, during one training session, was joined by the physicist, Richard Feynman, of the California

<sup>394</sup> Tuchman, *A Report on the Art & Technology Programme*, 156.

<sup>395</sup> Kitaj in Shannon, *Kitaj: Paintings, Drawings, Pastels*, 40.

<sup>396</sup> Tuchman, *A Report on the Art & Technology Programme*, 153.

Institute of Technology.<sup>397</sup> Kitaj made a number of drawings using a computer, including geometric abstracts and several versions of a girl's head in profile. These images would later resurface in the Robert Creeley print collaboration, *A Daybook*. Another head made on a computer, judging from the pixellated line, and also from the *Daybook*, is reproduced at the back of the catalogue to the 1970 exhibition *RB Kitaj: Pictures from an Exhibition* at Kestner Gesellschaft, Hannover. Entitled *Dine Frozen and Bruised*, the full face drawing of a man's head gazing upwards seems to be based on the features of Christ from Holman-Hunt's *Shadow of Death*.

Furthermore, the arch was designed on the computer, as was the Schlemmeresque figure referred to as the 'flying man' which surmounts one of the 'chimneys' in the A&T Report.<sup>398</sup> The specific significance of the flying man is not clear but it may be, amongst other things, a reference to Lockheed itself.

Some of the computer drawings utilise a spare, linear abstraction which has analogies with some of the illustrations in Smiles' *Lives of the Engineers*. Amongst these, for instance, is an engraving illustrating the plan of the forty-sixth course of the construction of John Smeaton's 1759 Eddystone lighthouse, showing the method of dovetailing the foundation blocks.<sup>399</sup> Smeaton had devised a method in which the blocks forming the foundations were cut to form elaborate interlocking polyhedrons, not the usual, straightforward cubes, adding extra structural strength against the battering of the sea. The plan in Smiles shows a series of concentric circles traversed by zig-zagging lines, calling to mind a variety of imagery from early-modernist

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<sup>397</sup> Tuchman, *A Report on the Art & technology Programme*, 158. Kitaj subsequently remembered Feynman as a rockstar-like figure complete with medallion and one too many shirt buttons undone. Conversation with Stephen Finer.

<sup>398</sup> Tuchman, *A Report on the Art & technology Programme*, 155.

<sup>399</sup> Samuel Smiles. *Lives of the Engineers: Smeaton and Rennie: Harbours – Bridges – Lighthouses* (London: John Murray, 1904), vol. 4, 145.

abstraction, via the diagrams of Ramon Lull, to alchemical and other occult prints of the Renaissance and Baroque periods. The similarity cannot have been lost on Kitaj. Indeed, some of the computer drawings he made at Burbank may have had their inspiration in this illustration. Two in particular spring to mind. One is a broad oval containing a polyhedral ‘arch’ (this is what Kitaj refers to as the viaduct) (fig. 62); the other is a circle containing lines and arcs (fig. 66). This latter also suggests the early paintings of Mondrian and even a heavily schematised take on analytical cubism. A further visual analogy is to be found in the musical scores of the American composer Earle Brown (1926-2002) in particular the score for *December 1952*. In this a series vertical and horizontal lines is distributed across the page, indicating not notes but range and duration.<sup>400</sup>

#### Wings (Recent Sculpture and Buildings)

Once installed at Burbank, Kitaj found, during his explorations of the plant, bins containing aircraft components that strongly resembled the Minimalist sculpture he had had in mind initially for his fictional artist’s studio. As the studio idea was, in any case, losing its charm for Kitaj, he chose to explore this theme in a peripheral project. This was a book of photographs taken by Malcolm Lubliner in which the aircraft parts were photographed against backdrops and from angles which created ambiguities of space and scale. The components then became monumental plaza-dominating sculptures. The book was produced in a very limited edition of just three copies. Other images were printed on a larger scale with the intention of displaying them as part of the finished installation along with a series of silkscreen prints, such

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<sup>400</sup> Peter Vergo, *The Music of Painting: Music, Modernism and the Visual Arts from the Romantics to John Cage* (London: Phaidon Press, 2010), 338-339.



as *Final – City of Burbank, California, Annual Budget 1968-69*, which was later incorporated into the print series *In Our Time*.

The book appeared in an edition of five, in 1971, under the full title of *Wings (Recent Sculpture and Buildings): A Collection of Works Produced at the Facilities of Lockheed-California, USA, in Collaboration with Los Angeles County Museum of Art*<sup>401</sup>. This is one of the few times Kitaj can be said to have simply taken a banal object and used it as the basis for a work. The book covers reproduced (though often with modifications ie ‘assisted’) as the print series *In Our Time* are another case often called Duchampian by commentators. But they are not quite readymades precisely because they are not *the books* but *images* of the books, which is another thing altogether. The same can be said of *Wings*, in which the objects acquire new meanings by their context and the manner in which they are photographed.

Of the sculptural elements themselves, I have been able to trace only one, an enigmatic conical structure, of vacuum formed plastic mounted on wood. This is *Black Mountain*, (fig. 57) its title a reference to the progressive arts college near Asheville, North Carolina. Black Mountain College (1933-57) numbered, at various times, Josef and Annie Albers, John Cage, Franz Kline, Willem de Kooning and Robert Motherwell amongst its faculty, and many leading American artists and writers of the 1950s studied there, Robert Rauschenberg and Cy Twombly to name but two. Its particular significance for Kitaj was its association with the Black Mountain poets, many of whom featured in his print cycle *First Series: Some Poets*, amongst them Robert Creeley, Robert Duncan, Ed Dorn and Charles Olson, who served as the Rector of Black Mountain in its final years.

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<sup>401</sup> Tuchman, *A Report on the Art & Technology Program*, 156.

According to *Pictures from an Exhibition*, the catalogue to his 1970 exhibition at Marlborough Fine Art, *Black Mountain* was made ‘in a small edition’.<sup>402</sup> Despite his subsequent dismissal of the Lockheed work as ‘that junk [...] of no consequence’, Kitaj kept one copy of *Black Mountain* for himself.<sup>403</sup> This he parted with only shortly before leaving London for Los Angeles in 1996, when he gave it to a friend, fellow painter Stephen Finer.<sup>404</sup> On the underside, he wrote a dedication in red felt-tip (fig. 58):

For Stephen  
with love  
from Kitaj

Black Mountain  
1966?

### Arches, Viaducts, Chimneys and Tunnels

Kitaj had made a series of preparatory drawings related to the project in London prior to his return to California. Apart from anything else, these are significant for being amongst his earliest published pastels. Three are illustrated in the *Art & Technology Report* (fig. 77 and 78). One, entitled *Drawing (from Lives of the Engineers)*, resurfaces in the Marlborough catalogue *RB Kitaj: Pictures from an Exhibition*. Although they are largely abstract, they are obviously based on images he had found in Smiles’ *Lives of the Engineers*, Klingender’s *Art & the Industrial Revolution* and Chappell’s *British Engineers*. Some of the few identifiable features are smoking chimneys, a motif he would resurrect in the mid-1980s, in works such as *The Jewish Rider, Passion (1940-45)* and *Painter (Cross and Chimney)*. One of the drawings reproduced in the *Art & Technology Report* includes outlines and rubbings of coins

<sup>402</sup> Marlborough Fine Art. *RB Kitaj: Pictures from an Exhibition* (London: Marlborough Fine Art, 1970), pages unnumbered.

<sup>403</sup> Andrew Lambirth, *Kitaj* (London, 2004), 137.

<sup>404</sup> Conversation with Stephen Finer, 2013.

and Kitaj has even written the word ‘coins’ on the drawing.<sup>405</sup> This must refer to industrial tokens for these were the inspiration behind the vacuum formed panels made for *Mock Up: Lives of the Engineers* and which were themselves prompted by industrial plaques and medals illustrated in Klingender. On the same drawing the word ‘tirgu’ appears. In the catalogue *Pictures from an Exhibition*, one deeply inscrutable image is catalogued as:

TIRGU (ARCH AND BENCH) (detail) 1968

Oil on canvas, wood, plastic, metal

214x28 cm/84x11 ins<sup>406</sup>

Kitaj’s love of ‘details’ is here taken to absurd lengths. Probably (and due to the obtuseness of the image this is speculation) this is the Lockheed arch/viaduct.

Bearing in mind Kitaj’s original idea of creating a studio

... like studios in the old days ... Medardo Rosso’s studio ... Brancusi’s studio ... that sort of thing

and the specific inspiration of the reconstruction of Brancusi’s studio in Paris in 1964, it seems reasonable to propose that the reference here is to Brancusi’s sculptures at Tîrgu Jiu (Târgu Jiu), Romania, erected in homage to the soldiers who died defending the city against the Central Powers in 1916.<sup>407</sup> Brancusi’s ensemble consists of three elements: the *Table of Silence*, the *Gate of the Kiss* and the *Endless Column*.

Presumably, Kitaj’s arch and chimneys had their beginnings in the latter elements.

Certainly, both the computer drawing for the arch and the finished sculpture bear more than a passing resemblance to Brancusi’s *Gate of the Kiss* (fig. 63).<sup>408</sup> Indeed,

<sup>405</sup> Tuchman, *A Report on the Art & Technology Programme*, 154.

<sup>406</sup> *RB Kitaj: Pictures at an Exhibition*. London: Marlborough Fine Art, 1978.

<sup>407</sup> Tuchman, *A Report on the Art & Technology Programme*, 147.

<sup>408</sup> The arch and the computer drawing are illustrated in Tuchman, *A Report on the Art & Technology Program*, 155 and 159.

the decorative frieze running around the top of the Kitaj has similarities to the carving to the upper section of Brancusi's work. At this point, and in this context, one is bound to recall Klingender again, and the idea of Kitaj merging imagery and concepts, for *Art and the Industrial Revolution* is thickly illustrated with images of viaducts (endless arches there, if no endless columns) including one view, *Entrance to Manchester across Water Street* (fig. 64), which features a curious double arch with no clear function dominating the middle distance.<sup>409</sup> It stands alone, a viaduct to nowhere, and it does not seem too far-fetched to suggest that this, with more than a dash of Brancusi, prompted Kitaj's own arch/viaduct for LACMA.

#### Further Observations

The previous sections sought to outline the *Mock Up: Lives of the Engineers* installation and to describe some of its more significant elements. Having done so, is it possible to offer any potential reading of it at this distance in time and given its fugitive nature? There are two broad observations I would like to make about it.

The first concerns the way Kitaj combines imagery drawn largely from Klingender with words drawn from Samuel Smiles. His evocation of Smiles – explicit in the tile of his installation and in the quotes from *Self-help* – should, perhaps, be read as ironic. In *Art and the Industrial Revolution*, Klingender himself identifies the flaw in Smiles' position:

... the doctrine of self-help as preached to the workers by Samuel Smiles was an illusion, for even if every worker had been a devoted follower of Smiles,

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<sup>409</sup> Francis Donald Klingender, *Art and the Industrial Revolution* (London: Noel Carrington, 1947), 205, pl. 72. The print is *Entrance into Manchester, Liverpool & Manchester Railway*. Aquatint by H Pyall, after TT Bury, 1831.

only a negligible minority could possibly have succeeded in rising above their station.<sup>410</sup>

With Klingender's words in mind, in so far as we can say anything at all about Kitaj's *Mock-up: Lives of the Engineers* it is, I suspect, best not read as James Aulich suggests, as having to do with 'notions of heroic materialism and to the memories of the great engineers and philanthropists of the industrial revolution'.<sup>411</sup> On the contrary, I would suggest it resonated far more with the artist's interest in the history of the Left. It is worth recalling Kitaj's own remarks made at the time he was involved in the Art & Technology project at Lockheed:

Obviously just seeing a stack on a landscape in Cornwall isn't a heavy enough occasion for me to live and die with. It's everything that those beginnings of industry imply that interests me more, that have always conditioned my thinking – the poverty, despair, loneliness. ... No matter what anyone says, any visual work is not going to stop at its visual nature; it will always carry philosophical implications.<sup>412</sup>

The point about poverty, despair and loneliness echoes something of the sentiment expressed in the Afterword to Rosa Luxemburg's *Letters from Prison*:

The struggles of the working class must be bitter always, dark sometimes, hopeless appearing often...<sup>413</sup>

And as Klingender goes on to say:

But the kind of self-help that alone could improve the workers' lot, or even enable them to maintain their standards, was the exact opposite of that taught by Smiles: it implied that each worker should fight for himself, by fighting side by side with his comrades for all; instead of the capitalist war of all against all, it implied the organisation of a united working class.<sup>414</sup>

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<sup>410</sup> Klingender, *Art and the Industrial Revolution*, 136.

<sup>411</sup> Aulich & Lynch, *Critical Kitaj*, 155.

<sup>412</sup> Tuchman, *A Report on the Art and Technology Program*, 162.

<sup>413</sup> Rosa Luxemburg, (trans. Paul, Eden and Cedar), *Letters from Prison* (Berlin: Publishing House of the Young International, 1923), 82.

<sup>414</sup> Klingender, *Art and the Industrial Revolution*, 136.

If this reading is correct, it would bring the installation into line with Kitaj's concerns with the Spanish Civil War and other episodes from the History of the Left as expressed in paintings such as *Kennst du das Land?*, *Specimen Musings of a Democrat*, *The Red Banquet*, and *The Murder of Rosa Luxemburg*. Indeed, it would be one of the artist's few major works to reflect, however obliquely, on the predicament of the working classes themselves, as opposed to the intellectuals whose arguments framed that predicament.

My second observation is that the iconography of the modern age, of industry and technology, had appeared in Kitaj's work before. (The history of the Left and the history of Modernity are, after all, closely related.) Images of the railway – arguably the defining image of industrial revolution, along with perhaps the factory chimney – occur surprisingly frequently throughout the 1960s, most notably in the screenprints, for instance, but usually amidst a battery of other visual material. In *Lives of the Engineers* it was the dominant image. Perhaps this was too blatant for Kitaj.

Certainly, from 1970 on it seems, at a superficial glance at least, that industrial imagery vanished from his work. But I do not think this is quite the case. On the contrary, I think it was subsumed and employed in more subtle and metaphorical ways and it is to this that I shall now turn.

### Modernity - Technology Applied

As the 1960s shaded into the 1970s, Kitaj's work underwent a shift of emphasis. The work became less fragmented, the figures more monumental, the compositions more integrated and grander. This was the beginning of the Kitaj we encounter in the majority of the current literature: Kitaj the champion of figurative art, whose own paintings are imbued with a form of confessional humanism. However, on analysis, I

am not so sure the segue was as abrupt as might at first appear. Echoes of technological modernity can be detected across a number of key works from the mid-1970s and early-1980s. Even Klingender's *Art & the Industrial Revolution* continued to provide source material, despite apparently being usurped by Walter Benjamin. In this section, I will explore those echoes with the aim of linking themes from the 1960s with those Kitaj subsequently chose to foreground. From the mid-1970s through the 1980s, Jewish themes became increasingly apparent in his work and a significant number of paintings and drawings deal, often in a highly metaphorical way, with arguably the central tragedy of 20<sup>th</sup> century Europe, the Holocaust.

I have the feeling that, in some sense, perhaps prompted by Klingender, Kitaj saw in 19<sup>th</sup> century industrial imagery a metaphor for a modern Inferno, which later became conflated in his mind with Holocaust imagery: the death camps as an extension or outcome of the industrial revolution, as it were. There has been an argument made for something very much like this by the sociologist, Zygmunt Bauman. In his book *Modernity and the Holocaust*, he analyses the ways in which modernity, technology and bureaucracy create the circumstances that allow large-scale persecution to occur.<sup>415</sup> Our tendency, he suggests, is to equate advances in modernity with advances in civilisation, whereas the reality is quite the opposite. For Bauman, events like the Holocaust are not, as we like to believe, aberrations. They are not regressions to some pre-civilised state and, therefore, events that we, the technologically advanced, civilized society can divorce ourselves from. On the contrary, they are intrinsically a product of our modernity.<sup>416</sup> For Bauman, the modern industrial (technological) world, through the imposition of the systems and bureaucracies needed for it to

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<sup>415</sup> A copy of Bauman's book was catalogued amongst Kitaj's Judaica at the time his library was being sold by Serendipity Books. Tracy Bartley, email to the author, 24.4.2009.

<sup>416</sup> Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989), 159-160.

function is, by its very nature, one which leads to or, let us say, creates the circumstances which make situations like the Holocaust possible.

Modernity legitimizes itself as a civilizing process – as an ongoing process of making the coarse gentle, the uncouth refined. Like most legitimations, however, this one is more an advertising copy than an account of reality. At any rate, it hides as much as it reveals and what it hides is that only through the coercion they perpetrate can the agencies of modernity keep out of bounds the coercion they swore to annihilate; that one person's civilizing process is another person's forceful incapacitation. The civilizing process is not about the uprooting, but about the redistribution of violence.<sup>417</sup>

Can we, then, read Kitaj's use of the imagery of modernity and technology as metaphors for the processes of dehumanisation and industrialised violence of 20<sup>th</sup> century history?

In the early 1980s, Kitaj embarked on a series of Holocaust themed paintings given the collective title *Germania*. At the end of the preface he wrote for the canvas *Germania (the Tunnel)* he notes:

The 'way' to the gas has been given several names. I believe I saw 'Tunnel' recorded somewhere. But subsequently, in Lanzmann's great film, Shoah, he presses an SS officer from Treblinka: 'Can you describe this "funnel" precisely? What was it like? How wide? How was it for the people in this "funnel"'.<sup>418</sup>

Is it possible that, in using a tunnel for his painting about the Holocaust, Kitaj was thinking about or conflating the idea he quotes in his preface with the tunnel imagery to be found in Klingender? When I say conflated here, I mean it in a constructive or creative sense, the sense in which artists actually spark ideas at an unconscious level. Let us be clear, it is Kitaj who writes of the way to the gas as a *tunnel*; the word used in the Shoah interview is funnel. Elsewhere in his preface, he states that the

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<sup>417</sup> Zygmunt Bauman, *Life in Fragments: Essays in Postmodern Morality* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 141.

<sup>418</sup> RB Kitaj, preface to *Germania (the Tunnel)* in Morphet, *RB Kitaj: A Retrospective*, 220.



architecture of the tunnel in the painting is based on a Van Gogh drawing, *Corridor in the Asylum (St Remy)*, now in the Metropolitan Museum, New York (fig. 85).

The central tunnel is, of course, taken from the van Gogh madhouse gouache ... It was van Gogh's transcription of Doré's prison courtyard that influenced me to transcribe van Gogh here.<sup>419</sup>

In aligning himself with Doré and van Gogh Kitaj, it could be argued, is legitimizing his own work. The precedence of the past confirms or affirms the present case, one might say. But, as we have seen, Kitaj had made work about tunnels before and that piece was based on material drawn from *Art & the Industrial Revolution*.

Klingender's book contrasts tunnel imagery as diverse as John Martin's painting *The Road to Hell*, JC Bourne's *Kilsby Tunnel* and other industrial scenes, amongst them J Harris's aquatint, *The Thames Tunnel* (1835) which, with its headlong perspective, resembles both van Gogh's drawing and Kitaj's painting. Some of this clearly fed into Kitaj's eerie diorama *Coal Mine* with its coal truck, railway line, flickering flames and, at its entrance, 'insinuating' texts from Samuel Smiles (Self Help, Character, Thrift, Duty).<sup>420</sup> This use of coercive, moralising texts one could argue found its most cynical application in the phrase 'Arbeit macht frei' at the gates of the Nazi concentration camps. Whether Kitaj had that allusion in mind for *Mock Up: Lives of the Engineers* we can only speculate. He must have been aware, though, through his reading of Klingender, of the absurdity of Smiles' rhetoric for the people who actually had to work in such crushing conditions as a 19<sup>th</sup> century mine. And, as Bauman reminds us, both these conditions and events such as the Holocaust are manifestations of modernity.

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<sup>419</sup> Morphet, *RB Kitaj: A Retrospective*, 219-220.

<sup>420</sup> RB Kitaj, *Mock-Up: Lives of the Engineers*, typed manuscript, UCLA, RB Kitaj Papers (Collection 1741), Box 119, folder 20.

It could be objected that it is stretching an argument a little too far in suggesting a link between Klingender's book, Kitaj's 1970 *Coal Mine* sculpture, and a painting made fifteen years later. However, *Germania (the Tunnel)* has a companion piece, *Germania (the Engine Room)*, 1983-86 (fig. 75). This canvas shows numerous figures, some with skull-like features, apparently stoking furnaces in a vast, pipe-filled interior, overlooked by two figures recalling Dante and Virgil in the *Inferno*. The composition is a direct transcription, barring the skull-faces in the foreground, of W Read's 1821 coloured lithograph, *Drawing the Retorts at the Great Gas Light Establishment, Brick Lane*, (fig. 76) which is illustrated in Klingender as plate 57, on page 197. We can, then, be certain that Kitaj was still looking at *Art & the Industrial Revolution* as late as the mid-1980s, and using it as the basis for Holocaust-themed paintings. In other words, the imagery of the Industrial Revolution serves as a metaphor for the Shoah.

Furthermore, in *Mock Up: Lives of the Engineers*, Kitaj employed chimneys as symbols of industry. In the early-1980s, he made a number of drawings and paintings in which he consciously attempted to imbue the chimney, as a symbol of suffering and of the Shoah, with something of the same iconographic resonance as the Crucifixion has for Christians. In a letter of May 1985 to the German art historian, Martin Roman Deppner, Kitaj wrote

So you can see, Martin, that your interest in these symbols of suffering are my interest as well. What shall stand for the Jewish PASSION as the cross?? A chimney with black smoke? I don't know; I shall try...<sup>421</sup>

The stylistic similarities between Kitaj's chimneys of the sixties and those of the eighties are suggestive, and it does not seem unreasonable to propose that their

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<sup>421</sup> Martin Roman Deppner, 'Letters to a Young German Painter', in Gillen, *Obsessions: RB Kitaj 1932-2007*, 106.

origins lie in the same sources as those of the Lockheed project. In *Germania (The Tunnel)* the artist himself appears, holding a walking stick, with one leg encased in a conical chimney-like structure (fig. 82 and 84). Smoking chimneys appear in *The Jewish Rider* (1984-5) (fig. 79) and again in *Passion (1940-45) Writing* (1985) (fig. 80). The rhomboid enveloping writer in the latter work echoes the shape of the chimneys, even as it suggests both a mandala and a coffin. In the pastel *Painter (Cross and Chimney)* (fig. 81) a female nude is trapped with the outline of a chimney. A chimney even appears as late as 2002-3 in the canvas *Los Angeles No 13 (The Pram)* (fig. 83).

Klingender and the imagery of the industrial revolution was, I propose, the source for an even more important work and that is *If Not, Not*, arguably Kitaj's masterpiece (fig. 67). According to Kitaj, this painting, made between 1975 and 1976, and now in the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, Edinburgh, was inspired by a visit to Venice.

The general look of the painting was conditioned by my first look at Giorgione's *Tempesta* on a visit to Venice, of which the little pool at the heart of my canvas is a reminder.<sup>422</sup>

In other words, *If Not, Not* is based on Giorgione's *Tempest* (fig. 69) rather in the same way that *Germania (The Tunnel)* is based on van Gogh and Doré. And, indeed, at the centre of *If Not, Not* is a pool which bears a resemblance to the bridge in the *Tempest*. Beyond that, though, the likeness is a vague one. At any rate, that image detail is just one small incidence in an otherwise highly complex composition. In the Giorgione painting, for instance, the landscape is essentially flat, in fact the scene

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<sup>422</sup> RB Kitaj, letter to Douglas Hall, February 1978. National Galleries of Scotland Archive. This letter is, barring a few minor amendments, largely the same as the preface published sixteen years later in the Tate catalogue, which indicates just how long, in some cases, these texts had been gestating.

feels like an enclosed stage set, whereas in the Kitaj it rises up to the plateau bearing the Auschwitz gatehouse.

Where might this distinctive topography have come from? In Klingender, between pages sixteen and seventeen, there is a reproduction of a coloured aquatint made by William Pickett and John Clark in 1805, after a drawing by Philip James de Loutherbourg. It shows ground zero of the industrial revolution, the iron works at Coalbrookdale: a location, that is, with some claim to being the birthplace of modern technology. The composition of this image, in which the landscape sweeps up from a foreground strewn with industrial fragments through a thickly wooded valley, past a broad river, to the iron works spewing fire and smoke atop an escarpment, has more than a passing resemblance to *If Not, Not*. It is reversed, though: the cliff is on the right rather than the left, as it is in Kitaj. Did this plate suggest *If Not, Not*? Perhaps, since he clearly knew the book in which it is reproduced.

But there may be an even more compelling candidate, also by de Loutherbourg. As we know, Kitaj visited the Science Museum. In the course of the *Art & Technology Report* we are told its reconstruction of a coal mine was a favourite of his son, Lem. Furthermore, the museum was within easy walking distance of his home in Elm Park Road. It is likely that during his visits he saw another of de Loutherbourg's visualisations of the Shropshire iron works and that is his canvas of 1801, *Coalbrookdale by Night* (fig. 68). In the painting and in the prints derived from his drawings, De Loutherbourg presents two versions of the industrial landscape. The prints and drawings of Coalbrookdale conform to the conventions of the day – they are largely topographically accurate though pastoralized visions of the English landscape, except for the furnace vapours tinting the sky with yellows, oranges and

purples. In *Coalbrookdale by Night*, on the other hand, he presents us with high Romanticism: a darkened, Gothic landscape eerily illuminated by the intense whites and oranges of the blast furnaces. There are shades of Wright of Derby here, especially his canvases of Vesuvius. And, in the late-18<sup>th</sup> and early-19<sup>th</sup> centuries, the period when de Louthembourg and Wright were at work, the industrialised landscape prompted reactions such as those of John Byng, Viscount Torrington, who wrote of an iron furnace in the Forest of Dean

I enter'd therein, and was well received by the devils who can bear the infernal heat, which soon drove me forth: they shewed me the iron melting, and the immense bellows moved by water, eternally keeping alive the monstrous fire; for they work day and night, and make about 4 tons in 24 hours.

Yet from these flames  
No light, but rather darkness visible  
Serv'd only to discover sights of woe.<sup>423</sup>

The lines are from Milton's *Paradise Lost* in which he describes the fate of the devils cast from heaven. But even his own words evoke a vision of Hell when he talks explicitly of 'the devils who can bear the infernal heat.'

The works of de Louthembourg and, for that matter, Wright of Derby, distantly recall the Last Judgement paintings of Pieter Brueghel and Hieronymous Bosch. Industrial paraphernalia had provided artists with a suitable manifestation of Hell as early as the Renaissance. Apocalyptic canvases such as Brueghel's *Dulle Griet*, for instance, clearly use early smelting technology as the basis for their visions of Hell-fire.

If we compare *Coalbrookdale by Night* with with *If Not, Not* a certain similarity emerges. The sulphurous clouds in the centre of the image, the escarpment surmounted by a gaunt building, and the ruin-strewn foreground, all have their

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<sup>423</sup> Quoted in Esther Moir, 'The Industrial Revolution: A Romantic View' in *History Today*, vol. 9, no. 9, September 1959, 592.

counterparts in Kitaj. And, unlike the print, the cliff is on the left-hand side of the canvas

If de Loutherbourg's painting provided the landscape and the tone of *If Not, Not*, what Kitaj drew from the Coalbrookdale print was the colour scheme, which combines strong bruised blue-greens, violet-greys and, in the centre, hot yellows and oranges, to create a sense of billowing vapours, of hot coloured clouds mingling together. In the print this effect represents steam and gases from the furnaces; in the Kitaj it represents the sky. This bilious colour scheme is as significant an element as the gatehouse and crawling figures, for it is this, more than anything else, which creates the impression of a poisonous atmosphere, which is so important for the impact of the work. Again, we should reflect on the influence of furnaces and forges on artists' visions of Hell – it does not then seem so absurd to suggest that Kitaj derived *If Not, Not*, appropriately enough, from de Loutherbourg's image of heavy industry in the heart of otherwise idyllic rural Shropshire, every bit as much as he did from Eliot's *The Waste Land* or Giorgione's *Tempesta*.

Marco Livingstone remarks, as have many others, that TS Eliot's *The Waste Land*, published in 1922, 'four years after the end of the First World War, was conceived after the carnage of the battlefields, as a rumination on the human wreckage left behind, and on the fragmentation of civilization facing humanity in its aftermath'<sup>424</sup>. He then proposes a similar link between *If Not, Not* and the Holocaust. Kitaj, of course, had himself made this connection in a letter about the painting, sent to the Scottish National Gallery in 1976, which he later reworked and published as one of

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<sup>424</sup> Marco Livingstone, 'Fertile Ground: T.S. Eliot and art history as springs of inspiration for Kitaj's *If Not, Not*', in TS Eliot & RB Kitaj, *The Waste Land* (San Francisco: Arion Press, 2007), 63. This is a deluxe edition of Eliot's poem interspersed with details from *If Not, Not*.

the Prefaces. The inclusion of the Auschwitz gatehouse, in any case, makes explicit reference to the Nazi death camps. I want to look at this more link closely because it throws up as many questions as answers. For instance, what does it do to the meaning of a painting if the artist includes such a freighted image? Kitaj was a subtle and thoughtful image-maker, especially so at this stage in his career. Meaning is never straightforward in his work. Imagery is combined and contrasted, in a post-Surrealist manner, creating new meanings or subverting old ones. However, the Auschwitz gatehouse, as an image, can never quite achieve the anonymity ultimately granted to most photographs; arguably, it can never be just a gatehouse.

Does including the Auschwitz gatehouse, and then going out of his way to identify it as such, earth, or short-circuit, the painting? The point is, once we know what this building is, we cannot view it neutrally, as simply one element of the composition. It remains the Auschwitz gatehouse, even though Kitaj's actual rendering of it makes it into something more like a castle or citadel. In fact, he has carefully modified the architecture, maintaining the overall disposition of elevation, but removing windows from the ground floor buildings and from the watchtower above the gate. In the painting, two small windows appear in the central block giving it the appearance of a schematic face with a gaping mouth, if we choose to read it thus. So this is not, as Martin Roman Deppner writes, just 'the quoted depiction of the main gate of Auschwitz'.<sup>425</sup> It is not, as in the screenprints, a photograph collaged into the composition; it is a subtly altered, hand drawn feature. For Deppner this edifice 'like a gate to hell, ... seems to have spewed out what once testified to human culture'. However, this gate/mouth is not spewing anything at all. On the contrary, if one wishes to see it in such figurative terms, it is open and waiting to devour not vomit.

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<sup>425</sup> Martin Roman Deppner, 'The Trace of the Other in the work of RB Kitaj' in Aulich & Lynch, *Critical Kitaj*, 182.

Within *If Not, Not*, it functions as a Hell Mouth such as can be found in northern Renaissance *Last Judgement* panels. In those earlier paintings, the mouth of Hell is rendered literally, as a gaping maw. Kitaj could hardly do this for the obvious reason that it would have seemed ludicrously melodramatic and, in any case, would have meant little to a contemporary audience, so he cast around for an alternative and perhaps inevitably lit upon Auschwitz.

If de Louthembourg provides the topography for *If Not, Not*, then in a sense, by overlaying the Auschwitz gatehouse onto the cradle of the industrial revolution, Kitaj can be said to route that event back to its source. Or to put it another way, he makes the events inseparable from the other. This brings the image, and I think much of Kitaj's work, into alignment with Bauman's idea of a dehumanising Modernity.

And yet the landscape of the painting does not feel particularly European, it does not, for instance, recall the plains and forests of central Europe in the way that Anselm Kiefer's meditations on 20<sup>th</sup> century German history do. There are palm trees in this particular inferno. Livingstone describes how:

Nature, even at its most austere, is in any case always beautiful in itself: it is only in its desecration by man that it is disfigured and rendered ugly. As depicted by Kitaj, this landscape is a place of dreamlike enchantment where one might expect to escape from one's woes and to encounter, as it two pertinent early paintings by Matisse of 1904-5 and 1905-6, *Luxe, calme et volupté* (in a phrase borrowed from Baudelaire's poem "L'Invitation au voyage") or *Le Bonheur de vivre*. Commingled with these sources and owing much to their hot and vibrant palette are Gauguin's Tahitian landscapes, populated with sensual women living an idyllic existence, which are among Matisse's own sources of inspiration. The palm trees also bring more contemporary echoes of southern California as depicted by Kitaj's old friend David Hockney, for example in his *Mist* lithograph of 1973, part of his weather series, in which three palm trees are silhouetted against a seductive pink sky.<sup>426</sup>

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<sup>426</sup> Eliot & Kitaj, *The Waste Land*, 65.



Palm trees certainly do not suggest central Europe but, rather, a more tropical topology: but southern California? Perhaps so – Kitaj had, after all, lived there for a period in the late 1960s. Gillen, I feel, is closer to the mark when he talks of a ‘paradise-like landscape with palms and waters beneath skies ablaze with Bengali light.’<sup>427</sup> Ablaze seems to be appropriate, as does the Asian location. However, I would like to propose another topography for the landscape of *If Not, Not*, and that is Vietnam.<sup>428</sup> At the time he was working on *If Not, Not*, the Vietnam War, the first media war, was drawing to a close. It is often forgotten that Vietnam began in 1955 and was at its most intense in the late-1960s and early-70s. In other words, it formed the contemporary political backdrop to Kitaj’s early career. Burning people were all around him. We only have to think of Nick Ut’s defining image of Vietnam, the photograph of the badly burned girl fleeing naked from her napalmed village, published in 1972. And yet, Kitaj seems to have little to say on this matter, at least not overtly. Nevertheless, during its course it had provided a mass of visual material, including still photography and film footage, documenting industrialised destruction amidst ‘simply beautiful countryside’.

Kitaj produced only one painting that makes overt reference to the Vietnam War, *Juan de la Cruz* of 1967 (fig. 91). The central figure of this composition is the imposing form of black US Army Sgt Cross, who makes the Christ-like gesture of opening his coat and pointing to his side. Although no wound is revealed, the implication that the young black soldier is some kind of modern martyr is clear enough. Kitaj effectively says as much in his preface first published in Livingstone’s monograph:

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<sup>427</sup> Gillen, *Obsessions*, 93.

<sup>428</sup> James Aulich has drawn attention to the withdrawal of American troops coinciding with the making of *If Not, Not*. See James Aulich, ‘The difficulty of living in age of cultural decline and spiritual corruption: R.B. Kitaj 1965-70’ in *Oxford Art Journal*, 1987, vol.10, no.2, 55.

Interesting about Vietnam .... (and art) .... Heresies and orthodoxies are always changing places, just as the line between heresy and orthodoxy in St Juan's time was very fine indeed. [...] Juan's poems express Christian Mystery; the Vietnam wars are most awful expressions of political mystery, the mystery of Realpolitik; so the painting is a Mystery-picture.<sup>429</sup>

For the Tate Retrospective, he modified the opening sentence to:

This is the only picture I did about Vietnam (partly), and since then, heresies and orthodoxies about that war have changed places many times, just as they do in art and just as the line between heresy and orthodoxy in St Juan's time was very fine indeed.<sup>430</sup>

That 'partly' interests me very much. It could mean, this picture is only partly about Vietnam; or (and to my mind this is the reading the syntax most strongly suggests) this is *to a degree or to some extent* the only picture I did about Vietnam. Kitaj was keenly aware of language and that rather sly 'partly' is not where it is by accident. Remember Jonathan Williams remark that 'Kitaj would be no less interested in a scrap of newspaper photo, or the musical construct of a few words by Basil Bunting, or the politics of a symphony by Mahler'.<sup>431</sup>

Around the time he made *Juan de la Cruz*, Kitaj was teaching at Berkeley and must have been fully aware of the student unrest going on not just in the States but around the world, especially as it related to US foreign policy generally and the Vietnam War in particular. Whilst working at Lockheed (as already stated, a major supplier to the US military) Kitaj 'argued' about the war with the technicians helping construct *Lives of the Engineers*.<sup>432</sup> But that brings to another curious aspect of Kitaj: although his work deals in history and politics, it never deals *explicitly* in the contemporary, only the past.

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<sup>429</sup> Livingstone, *R.B. Kitaj*, 148-9.

<sup>430</sup> Morphet, *R.B. Kitaj: A Retrospective*, 90.

<sup>431</sup> Jonathan Williams, *Portrait Photographs* (London: Coracle Press, 1979), unpaginated.

<sup>432</sup> Tuchman, *A Report on the Art & Technology Program*, 158.

Relatively few artists dealt with Vietnam as it unfolded. In film, John Wayne's pro-American intervention, *The Green Berets*, was released in 1968 at the height of the war and the protests against it. Leon Golub tackled the subject directly, with typically visceral brio, in two series of paintings, *Napalm* and *Vietnam*, which he produced from the late-1960s through the mid-1970s. All of the Hollywood films about Vietnam currently most celebrated were made in the aftermath of the conflict. *The Deer Hunter* and *Apocalypse Now* were released in 1978 and 79 respectively, for instance; within three years of *If Not, Not*, that is, which is suggestive. Clearly, Vietnam and its legacies were subjects ripe for exploration for a younger generation of American artists and film-makers.<sup>433</sup> The smell of napalm still hung in the air.

The bodies strewn along the riverbank in *If Not, Not* also call to mind images from more recent history, in documentary footage from Vietnam. In particular, they recall photographs of the killing of over 500 villagers, the majority women and children, by US troops at My Lai, photographs taken as the event unfolded by a US Army photographer. The massacre at My Lai took place on March the 16<sup>th</sup> 1968. It was first reported in *The Cleveland Plain Dealer*, of all places, on November 20<sup>th</sup> 1969, (fig. 74) and later given wider coverage in the pages of *Time* magazine. Some of the photographs show clearly traumatized villagers moments before they were shot but, perhaps, the most searing images are of the aftermath: amidst the sunlit landscape of rural Vietnam ('simply beautiful countryside' indeed) lie bloodstained bodies, one or two here, a heap there. The photographs were taken by US Army photographer Ronald Haeberle, a native of Cleveland, born in 1940, just eight years Kitaj's junior. It is hard to believe that Kitaj was entirely unaware of these images and that did not

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<sup>433</sup> Both Michael Cimino, director of *The Deer Hunter*, and Francis Ford Coppola, director of *Apocalypse Now*, were born in 1939 making them near contemporaries of Kitaj. Stanley Kubrik, whose own take on Vietnam, *Full Metal Jacket*, was released in 1987, was born in 1928.

feel sharply the coincidence of them being made by a close contemporary from his hometown and, moreover, someone who bore the same name, at that.<sup>434</sup> Writing of the group of scattered figures, Kitaj, like TS Eliot, cites Joseph Conrad: ‘the dying figures among the trees to the right of my canvas make similar use of Conrad’s bodies strewn along the riverbank’ from *Heart of Darkness*. Eliot’s *The Waste Land* also makes use of water – eg the stagnant canal with its rubbish-strewn towpath – as a metaphor for cultural and moral decay. The actual source of figures on the right-hand of the canvas is a still from Vsevolod Pudovkin’s *Mother* (fig. 71).<sup>435</sup> This film made in 1929 constructs its narrative around the struggle against Tsarist oppression and revolutionary conflict. The sprawled inverted figure and the crawling man with the satchel are obviously from Pudovkin but so, too, are the small figures in the wood at centre-right, albeit heavily modified. The figure on all fours, for instance, appears twice: as a headless, apparently female, nude, and, reversed, as a priest in a black cassock and white surplice. On the other hand, the lying and seated figures are transcribed more or less directly. The still from which these figures are derived is the climactic scene in which prisoners attempting to escape from gaol with the aid of revolutionaries – including the eponymous Mother and her son – are slaughtered by Tsarist forces. Kitaj often seems to have preferred imagery that was pre-charged, as it were, imagery that came with its own associations, which added to the range of allusions and themes at play in his own work. For instance, by placing Pudovkin’s dead revolutionaries in an environment that recalls Vietnam but within sight of the Auschwitz gatehouse he creates for his imagery something akin to an oscillation of meaning – the viewer sees one or more, or even all allusions at once, depending on the point of view, but without the meaning ever quite settling down.

<sup>434</sup> A further nominal coincidence is that one of the commanding officers responsible for My Lai was 2LT Stephen Brooks.

<sup>435</sup> See Aulich and Lynch, *Critical Kitaj*, 186.

The Vietnam War had limped to its ignominious conclusion in 1975, the very year Kitaj began work on *If Not, Not*. The painting's topography (the riverine setting, the sub-tropical foliage, the bodies scattered along rural roads) is redolent of the Vietnam War imagery seen in film, on television, and in the printed media. It is not my intention to argue that *If Not, Not* is about Vietnam, though I think its odour permeates the canvas every bit as much as the Holocaust does. Kitaj himself identifies two strands in the painting: the Holocaust being one; the other being a 'certain allegiance to Eliot's Waste Land and its (largely unexplained) family of loose assemblage.'<sup>436</sup> The Holocaust theme 'coincides with that view of the Waste Land as an antechamber to Hell'. Eliot, Kitaj reminds us alluded to Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and 'the dying figures among the trees to the right of my canvas make similar use of Conrad's bodies strewn along the riverbank.'<sup>437</sup> As Kitaj in Chelsea worked on his canvas fusing Eliot, Conrad, Auschwitz, Giorgione and de Loutherbourg, another American, Francis Ford Coppola, was busy fusing Eliot, Conrad and Vietnam, in the movie *Apocalypse Now*, a title which could equally well be applied to *If Not, Not*. Coppola's film, like Kitaj's painting, draws inspiration from Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, and through the range of its allusions themes broader than the Vietnam War itself. Both works – painting and film – present what, I feel, can be usefully described as visions of 'the antechamber to Hell'. If, as Livingstone suggests, *The Waste Land* is a 'rumination ... on the fragmentation of civilization' following the First World War, it does not seem unreasonable to suppose that *If Not, Not* bears a similar relationship to the Holocaust and the Vietnam War. It both is and is not, at the same time. Apart from the adaptation of the Auschwitz Gatehouse, none of the imagery in the painting specifically recalls the Holocaust. On the other hand,

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<sup>436</sup> RB Kitaj RB, preface to *If Not, Not*, in Morphet, *RB Kitaj: A Retrospective*, 120.

<sup>437</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.

some elements recall the Vietnam War imagery. For example, there are two paths or roads in almost headlong perspective, vanishing into the depths of the image. Similar roads in headlong perspective vanishing towards unseen villages are a remarkably consistent feature of Vietnam photojournalism, which suggests such photography helped Kitaj construct his antechamber to Hell (fig. 72). Even the use of a saturated orange for the sky can be interpreted as the intense orange of a napalm explosion or more metaphorically as Agent Orange – the herbicide employed by the Americans for their scorched earth programme pursued during the conflict.<sup>438</sup> An iron furnace suggested infernal visions to Viscount Torrington in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. His quote from Milton could be said to anticipate any number of events from the 20<sup>th</sup> century:

Yet from these flames  
No light, but rather darkness visible

Kitaj clearly intended the Holocaust to be a theme of this painting; the inclusion of the Auschwitz Gatehouse testifies to that. But the canvas amounts to more than the sum of its references, whether they be Auschwitz, Conrad, Eliot, the Vietnam War or the birth of Modernity. The strident colours and disjointed images encountered in *If Not*, *Not* feel apocalyptic, undoubtedly, but in a similar way to a film like *Performance* feels apocalyptic: like a bad trip bought on as the Sixties metamorphosed into the 1970s.

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<sup>438</sup> The suggestion of Napalm and even Agent Orange created by the painting's strident hues has been remarked on by Michael Glover in his article 'Great Works: If Not, Not, 1975-6, RB Kitaj' in *The Independent*, 20.1.2012. <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/art/great-works/great-works-if-not-not-19756-1524cm-x-1524cm-r-b-kitaj-6291802.html> accessed 13/07/2015 11:58am.

## Conclusion

The bureaucracy of corporate working tested Kitaj's enthusiasm seriously over the course of the project. His attitude to that element of the Lockheed experience is summed up in Tuchman's Report:

Thinking about it now, so much seems *so* funny, *so* ridiculous; maybe that's got to be one of the best results: ... And the kind of fake and ultimately meaningless (for my own life) encounter over those weeks with the really enormous tidal wave of machinery and a massive technology I could never hope to approach intelligently let alone fathom. Maybe the heart of the experience lies there for me – a confirmation of the utter boredom I always feel when art and science try to meet ...<sup>439</sup>

Kinsman, as I pointed out at the beginning, sees this as one of the reasons behind Kitaj's return to a more direct way of working. It is indicative of the shift in approach the takes place in Kitaj's art from around 1969 until 1976 and the *Human Clay*. A similar *rapelle a l'Ordre* can be identified in David Hockney's work at around the same time as the raw facture of his early work was replaced by austere photorealism. Indeed, the two men had even appeared naked on the cover of the January 1977 edition of *The New Review* (Kitaj retained his vest), which also featured an interview in which they argued for a return to figuration.

Against this background, how reasonable is Kitaj's assessment of his Lockheed work as 'documentary' rather than art? Unlike his screenprints, which have clear links with the paintings, *Mock Up: Lives of the Engineers* is peripheral, at least formally. There was too little of it, and certainly too little of it left today, for us to regard it as anything else. We are not, as I have already admitted, really in possession of enough information to assess it as art. What is left is evidence, so in that sense, at least, it is documentary. Its interest now is three-fold. First, it shows that Kitaj was prepared to

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<sup>439</sup> Tuchman, *A Report on the Art and Technology Program*, 160.

experiment, in terms of both his media and his practices, even as an established thirty-seven year old painter. Not only were his procedures at Burbank collaborative, as were his screenprints, they explored new media such as computer graphics and plastics. Second, it shows that whatever he was doing formally, Kitaj's intellectual concerns remained constant. For Kitaj did what no other artist involved in the programme did: he made industry the subject of his work. It's clear that he went to Lockheed with a readymade idea – the sculptor's studio – but that he quickly dropped it, or at any rate significantly modified it, in favour of something else, something that spoke directly to the subject of technological and engineering history. Great for Robert Rauschenberg to make an animated mud-pie or Andy Warhol to make indoor rain but these now look like novelty works led by the technology rather than use of the technology to express ideas about that self-same subject. Thirdly, it is interesting for its afterlife. Burbank may have been a cul-de-sac formally but not iconographically. As we have seen, both the tunnel and the chimney would resurface in the 1980s as symbols of the Shoah. Furthermore, Klingender would remain a source to be mined for imagery over the same period. Technology and industry become metaphors for the dehumanising effects of modernity.

Still, the fact remains Kitaj obviously did not feel that his endeavours were worth building on. The Burbank work remains potential in the way that Eliot's *Sweeney Agonistes* remains potential. It could have marked the start of something very new; instead, in both cases, the artist pulled back into the safety of tradition. As the 1960s segued into the 70s, Kitaj began to return with renewed conviction to painting and to commit himself to life drawing, moves which were to culminate in the major canvases of the mid-1970s such as *If Not, Not*, *The Orientalist* and *Moresque*, and the polemic



of *The Human Clay* – although, as we have seen, whispers of Art and Technology remain even in the first of those grand paintings.

In spite of this, he obviously thought the work was worth saving. Why else offer it to Tate? There is a form of double-think going on here, which reveals Kitaj's vacillations. He had first offered some of this material to the Tate Gallery in 1972 but he was still going back to them in 1975, the year he was working on *The Human Clay*, and the very same year he wrote the letter to Carol Hogben, quoted in the last chapter, in which he refused an exhibition of his screenprints. This letter is indicative of Kitaj's sensitivity to his public image as an artist. Yet, at the same time, he is presenting just such 'modernist' material to the National Gallery of British and Modern Art. It is even more curious, of course, is that he was still engaged in making collage-based screenprints. But perhaps I am falling into a trap here. In my haste to find inconsistencies in his thinking, maybe I am overlooking contrary evidence. He does, after all, write to Hogben that his 'very identity as an artist is bound up with an insistence on range', and the emphasis is Kitaj's own.<sup>440</sup> That, though, is typical of Kitaj: he insists on range, as he insists on multiple readings, even as his writings seem to limit the debate. Much the same is going on when he retrospectively emphasises Jewish themes in his early work. He appears to be opening up extra layers of meaning but this can be construed as closing them off. At the end of the section of the A&T Report devoted to his project, Kitaj is quoted as saying

There is no, or very little question of, ultimate meaning, as, I think, issues of meaning are far less clear than is often supposed, even in simple, abstract art ... The [project] might have been called 'The Vitality of Fresh Disorder.' That's Blackmur's phrase ... and he goes on to say: 'Each time we look at a

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<sup>440</sup> RB Kitaj, letter to Carol Hogben, 8<sup>th</sup> April 1975. V&A, NAL, 86.WW.1, MSL/1985/33.

set of things together, but do not count them, the sum of the impressions will be different, though the received and accountable order remains the same.'<sup>441</sup>

This feels appropriately open-ended but it highlights one of the many fascinating issues which arise when looking at Kitaj. Both he and his apologists (Livingstone, Morphet, et al) refer to people like Benjamin and Warburg and one feels, initially, that this helps to explain the work. Except, on reflection it dawns that, actually, nothing has been explained. Indeed, these historical figures are introduced so as to suggest work that is deliberately open-ended, capable of multiple readings (and Kitaj's own prefaces and afterwords reinforce this). However, an alternative reading suggests that the debate has been restricted. According to this view, Kitaj is trying to maintain authorial (or authoritarian) control. As John Lynch writes:

Kitaj is not pointing to the instability inherent in meaning and reading as it shifts from one register (public) to another (private) but is wanting to deny one side of this relationship and advance the other...<sup>442</sup>

How are we to interpret this situation? If he really thought such material as the Burbank work was not art, why propose it as a gift to a major museum? He surely cannot have thought such a large item would be accepted as 'documentary'. More likely, he knew fine well that it had value as an example of his artistic development, even if for him it was a dead-end, and was therefore keen to see it preserved. And the fact is that a large, fragile mixed-media work like *Our Thing* needed to be in a museum not hanging around in a dealer's warehouse where, according to Morphet, it

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<sup>441</sup> Tuchman, *A Report on the Art and Technology Program*, 163.

<sup>442</sup> Lynch, in Aulich & Lynch, 66.

had already lost some elements. It was disintegrating and Kitaj did not want to see it lost.<sup>443</sup>

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<sup>443</sup> Morphet, Tate acquisition file TG 4/2/567/1.

## Chapter 5

### A POPULAR FRONT

After 1970, Kitaj embarked on a reassessment of his practice. This manifested itself primarily as a renewed engagement with life-drawing, including formal drawings in pastel, and a reassertion of the human figure in his paintings. As discussed previously, his compositions became formally more coherent and less obviously constructed from fragments. Overt references to Modernist abstraction, such as the use of formalist grids and other geometric devices, diminished – though they did not disappear altogether. Furthermore, he began to make increasingly more overt references to past masters, such as Degas and Cézanne, in both his work and in statements – his use of pastels in homage to Degas being one of the most obvious examples. Significantly, his statements took on a polemical edge in which he argued for a return to an art centred on the human form, a position which, in 1976, culminated in his devising an exhibition, *The Human Clay*, which focused on contemporary British figurative art and drawing. One consequence of this show was the emergence, thanks to Kitaj's catalogue essay, of the notion of a School of London. What the term means precisely, if indeed it has (or ever had) a fixed meaning, has not been fully explored. In its popular application, though, it has come to mean the group of figurative painters associated with Francis Bacon, most of whom came to prominence in the 1950s and early 1960s. They include Lucian Freud, Frank Auerbach, Michael Andrews, Leon Kossoff and RB Kitaj.

This is also the period in which Kitaj begins to sift his output. The Lockheed project all but disappears from the record, in large part because no significant elements found their way into a major British or American gallery. As I have discussed, the

screenprints also fade from view, even though he continued to produce them well into the 1970s. Ever the paradox, he told Marlborough Fine Art not to exhibit his earlier prints, although he did not prohibit the gallery from selling them.<sup>444</sup> In other words, those aspects of his work that conflicted most seriously with the concerns then uppermost in his mind were sidelined. Even his early canvases are edited down to a shortlisted few of which tend to appear predictably in the major monographs and exhibition from the mid-1970s onwards.

Every monograph and catalogue on Kitaj from 1980 onwards mentions *The Human Clay*. Usually it is described as polemical or controversial, and its constant reiteration in his biography consolidates its significance both as an event in itself and for the understanding of his work. Certainly, it was a watershed for Kitaj, marking the point at which his controversialist tendencies were given their most public platform. However, so far relatively few commentators have really tried to explain what the show was and certainly nobody has ever tried to assess its success against its stated aims nor yet has anybody attempted to contextualise it. It is presented as an almost *sui generis* event. In the current literature, *The Human Clay* is usually explained as a case for figuration made amidst the overwhelming fashion for abstraction. However, the situation seems unlikely to have been quite so clear-cut.

### The Human Clay

Today, we can only approach *The Human Clay* through the catalogue and contemporary reviews. Viewed simply as an object, the catalogue reminds us that Britain in the mid-1970s was hit by inflation, industrial unrest, and the slow disintegration of traditional industry, for this is as dour an example of recession

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<sup>444</sup> Ramkalawon, *Kitaj Prints: A Catalogue Raisonné*, 8.

publishing as ever there was. About the size of an A5 notebook, with beige paper covers and printed in monochrome throughout, it might, at first glance, seem to exude three-day week austerity.<sup>445</sup> On the other hand, the Arts Council published other catalogues during this period which exhibit much more opulent production values, which rather suggests *The Human Clay* looks this way because that was what somebody (presumably Kitaj) wanted. Viewed in this light, the catalogue's spartan feel can be read as one element of a neo-puritan agenda on Kitaj's part. It would tie in with the emphasis he places upon hard work and commitment in his essay. This text forms the core articulation of his argument for the exhibition and I will analyse it, in due course.

1976 was also the year in which Kitaj tried (for the second time) to give Tate some of the sculpture he had made for Los Angeles County Museum of Art's *Art & Technology Programme*. And around the same time, he refused to allow any of the screenprints to be included in Carol Hogben's proposed exhibition. It is against this somewhat conflicted background that he was busy buying for the Arts Council and formulating his apologia for figurative art.

Although it may at times appear so, *The Human Clay* was not quite a one-person crusade. It emerged from the inner workings of the heart of the artistic establishment, the Arts Council of Great Britain. The Arts Council, the governmental body responsible of cultural provision within the UK, had its roots in the Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts, founded in 1940 to maintain and promote

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<sup>445</sup> Only a couple of years before *The Human Clay* opened, fuel shortages brought on by industrial unrest meant that the country was hit by power-cuts. There was no electricity in the evenings and people had to rely on candles and oil lamps to light their homes. In 1975, inflation hit 24.2%, the second highest since records began in 1750 and the highest since 1800. 1976 was the bicentenary of United States of America. It was also the year twelve IRA bombs explode in central London, and the Cod War began in the north Atlantic, between Britain and Iceland. As if that wasn't eventful enough, by the middle of the year a heat wave was baking the nation, with temperatures around 30-35C, resulting in the worst drought in Britain since the 1720s.

British culture. In addition to administering grants for artists and arts organisation, it maintained and developed its own Arts Council Collection, a significant resource for the definition of British visual culture, and also had its own exhibition space, the Hayward Art Gallery, part of London's South Bank complex and, in the 1970s, arguably London's premier contemporary art gallery. Although, the Arts Council employed its own curators to acquire new material for the collection, it also commissioned guest curators, often artists but also art historians and critics, to make acquisitions on its behalf. For the period 1975-76, RB Kitaj was invited to be one of these buyers, alongside sculptor Brian Kneale, painter Paul Huxley and Peter Turner.<sup>446</sup> So, for the space of twelve months, Kitaj was able to buy works of art that would be added to the national collection and would, therefore, help to shape the understanding of British art at that point in time. In his own account of things, he told the Arts Council that he 'would only buy pictures representing people, for many reasons'.<sup>447</sup> Amongst these reasons were:

I am a poor judge of abstraction and an even poorer judge of the host of art-things in the non-picture line, even when I have given in to those post-Duchampian temptations myself.'

It will be seen here that he is subtly projecting an I'm-just-an-ordinary-guy image of himself in these remarks. For someone so well versed in early-Modernism and Mondrian, in particular, to present himself in this way is perplexing, to say the least. And the reference to Duchamp is especially ironic. Kitaj's work up to and, in some respects, including the 1970s had often involved Duchamp influenced tactics – the screenprints and *Lives of the Engineers*, being only the most obvious examples. Even

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<sup>446</sup> <http://www.thegathering-artsCouncilcollection.org.uk/pastpurchasers> accessed 5.5.2012.

<sup>447</sup> RB Kitaj, *The Human Clay*, (London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1976), unpaginated.

more to the point, Kitaj had actually debated the subject with Duchamp, as we shall see.

In the event, amongst the artists whose work he bought were Michael Andrews, Frank Auerbach, Stephen Buckley, John Golding, Richard Hamilton, William Scott and William Turnbull. With a few exceptions, most pieces were drawings, often early, unrepresentative examples, or as in Andrews' case studies for larger work. This can be explained partially by a limited budget, although Kitaj's agenda ultimately shaped the final selection. This material formed the core of the exhibition's content. Most of the works are less than a metre high, indeed most are 50 cm high or less, which is to be expected with drawings. Among the larger, more imposing items are Stephen Buckley's *Three Figures Dancing* (190 x 230cm), Leon Kossoff's oil *Portrait of George Thompson* (123 x 78cm) (fig. 86) and Carel Weight's *The World We Live In* (120.5 x 94.5cm) (fig. 87).

The show's title, as he explained in the catalogue, comes via David Hockney, who 'likes to quote from Auden's long poem *Letter to Lord Byron* which reads "To me art's subject is the human clay."<sup>448</sup> In *David Hockney by David Hockney*, another product of 1976, Hockney says of Auden:

I don't think he had much visual feeling but I'm always quoting those lines from Auden's *Letter to Lord Byron* – I love them: To me art's subject is the human clay / Landscape but a background to a torso; All Cézanne's apples I would give away / For a small Goya or a Daumier.' ... I know Cézanne's apples are very special, but if you substitute 'all Don Judd's boxes I would give away, or for that matter all Hockney's pools, for a small Goya or a Daumier' it has more meaning. I'm sure that's what he really meant.<sup>449</sup>

<sup>448</sup> Kitaj, *The Human Clay*, unpaginated.

<sup>449</sup> Hockney cited in Stangos, *David Hockney by David Hockney*, 195.



On one level, as the title of an exhibition devoted to images of the figure, ‘human clay’ is particularly apt and one might care to leave it at that but the invocation of Auden adds an extra dimension, which cannot be ignored. Auden had, in fact, died in 1973 shortly before Kitaj began collecting for the Arts Council. When Hockney made his well-known drawing of the poet in 1968. Kitaj tagged along and made his own.<sup>450</sup> As I have shown, throughout his career Kitaj had summoned forth the Spirit of the 1930s and the Spanish Civil War. Auden and his contemporaries came to prominence at precisely this time, propounding a more or less Left-leaning political stance, indeed Stephen Spender’s run-in with Harry Pollit, leader of the British Communist Party, had given Kitaj the title to one of his prints: ‘Go and get killed, comrade – we need a Byron in the movement.’ His catalogue essay for *The Human Clay* expressly alludes to the history of the Left by heading the final section *Popular Front*.<sup>451</sup> In it he writes:

Some argument may be suggested here but argument within the art, within a Popular Front, a grand old concept which is being revived in southern Europe in a beautiful way.<sup>452</sup>

He means at least in part Spain, which, following the death of Franco the previous year, was slowly casting off the vestiges of right-wing dictatorship to emerge as a modern democracy. But Spain was not the only country in Southern Europe to be emerging from the shadow of authoritarianism in the 1970s – its neighbour, Portugal, and Greece also saw decades of right-wing dictatorship draw to a close. Whilst this might, on the face of it, be considered a good thing, in the geopolitical climate of the 1970s it was problematic, to say the least, for in the wake of the generalissimos came

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<sup>450</sup> Hockney later recalled, ‘The drawings were done because Peter Heyworth, the music critic of the Observer, asked me if I’d like to draw Auden and I said certainly I would, just because I wanted to meet him. He was staying with Peter Heyworth, who arranged a time for me to go. Ron Kitaj and Peter Schlesinger came along with me.’ Stangos, *David Hockney by David Hockney*, 194.

<sup>451</sup> Kitaj, *The Human Clay*, unpaginated.

<sup>452</sup> Ibid.

the Socialists and, even more worryingly, the Communists. This was a cause for concern, if not alarm, in the United States of America who found themselves uneasily contemplating the possibility of fighting the Cold War with allies with communists involved in their government. In Italy, for instance, the Communist Party was flourishing. For all four countries were, from the perspective of the Western powers, strategically significant in the stand-off with the Soviet Union: Greece for its proximity to the Balkans, Italy as part of the Mediterranean, Portugal as part of the Atlantic area, and Spain also as part of the Atlantic and Mediterranean area, as well as for its cultural importance as part of Western Europe. Following the Korean War in 1950, American policy hardened towards the emerging Left in Europe and any pretence that democratization should be fostered in the southern European dictatorships was abandoned. By the mid-1970s, its perceived failure to halt the Soviet inspired expansion of communism in South America, South East Asia and Africa, led the US government to take a less than indulgent line regarding what it saw as the re-emergence of Communism in southern Europe.

Kitaj alludes to political circumstances in Italy in a statement written for the catalogue to the exhibition *Arte inglese oggi* organised in 1976 by Norbert Lynton for the Palazzo Reale, Milan:

People are now looking to Italy because of the extraordinary and moving political discussion going on there. I wish you luck and look forward to the day when our art is delivered from the moribund legacies of a once heroic modernism. Great reforms are in the air and I hope that our art may be brought back from the trivial margins of society into the social heartland.<sup>453</sup>

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<sup>453</sup> RB Kitaj, statement quoted in Norbert Lynton (ed.), *Arte inglese oggi 1960-76*, (Milan: Electa, 1976), vol. 1, 128.

The political reforms Kitaj foresaw for Italy were dashed two years later when Red Brigade terrorists kidnapped and murdered former Prime Minister, Aldo Moro, President of the centre left Christian Democrat Party (CDP). Moro had been snatched at gunpoint as he headed for a vote to inaugurate a new government, one founded on a controversial alliance between the CDP and the Italian Communist Party. The point here, I think, is that Kitaj like many others on the Left saw the situation from a position of indulgence. The struggles in southern Europe were not ones Kitaj, an outsider, was truly involved in. He could and did move freely in and out of Franco's Spain, for instance. He was not *engaged* in the way that his friend Josep Vicente was engaged. And despite his political views and experience of Spain, he did not paint images that dealt directly with Franco or his regime. He never produced work which blatantly addressed contemporary political brutality, unlike fellow American Leon Golub, say, who at exactly the same time that Kitaj was formulating a School of London was busy creating images which quite literally depicted torture, as well as portraits of twentieth century dictators past and present, including Franco. In Germany, Kitaj's exact contemporary, Gerhard Richter, was also tackling recent European history in a series of canvases which looked at his family's relationship with the Nazis – as both participants and victims. Later, he would turn his attention to contemporary matters in a cycle of fifteen canvases documenting the arrest and deaths of various members of the German terrorist cell Red Army Faction, better known as the Baader-Meinhoff Gang. Ultimately, Kitaj's use of the term 'popular front' with its allusions to a broad Left-liberal alliance in opposition to Fascism should, perhaps, be read as part of a sentimental enthusiasm for Socialism. This manifests itself in a different form in his response, quoted earlier, to the Lockheed technicians who

assisted him with *Lives of the Engineers*: 'I won't forget them in that stinking suburban valley and hope they get out into those National Parks a lot.'<sup>454</sup>

Amongst the drivers for this recalibration of his approach are two crucial biographical events. First, in 1969, Kitaj's wife Elsi died of an overdose at their Oxford home. Her death may have been an accident though suicide seems more likely.<sup>455</sup> In response to this devastating event, he took his young family (the couple had a son, Lem, and an adopted daughter, Dominie) to America, where he was teaching at the University of California in Los Angeles. Understandably, he did very little work at this time, although he did produce many of the *In Our Time* screenprints which, in a nod to Duchamp, depict subtly altered book covers. He also began a large canvas about Hollywood, visiting many of the great directors of the golden age, such as Jean Renoir, Rouben Mamoulian and John Ford, to make drawings and photographs, but he did not complete the painting and it was subsequently destroyed.<sup>456</sup> The second important event was that, whilst in Los Angeles, Kitaj briefly met a young artist called Sandra Fisher who was working as an assistant at the Gemini Print Studios. In 1972, a year or so after his return to England, he bumped into Sandra again, quite by chance, and they began the relationship that was to last until her death in 1994. Sandra was a dedicated figurative painter, who worked strictly from life. Her influence on Kitaj is, I think, not to be underestimated. It was she, for instance, who encouraged Kitaj to begin using pastel.<sup>457</sup> Indeed, Sandra seems to have had some involvement in most of Kitaj's subsequent projects.<sup>458</sup> Similarly, the influence of

<sup>454</sup> Tuchman, *Report of the Art and Technology Project*, 158

<sup>455</sup> <http://www.cosmoetica.com/DSI21.htm> accessed 31.8.2012. *The Dan Schneider Interview 21: Lem Dobbs* (first posted 1/25/10).

<sup>456</sup> Morphet, *RB Kitaj: A Retrospective*, 61.

<sup>457</sup> Kinsman, *Kitaj Prints*, 96. In fact, Kitaj had used pastel before meeting Sandra Fisher. A number of preparatory drawings for the Lockheed project were made using pastel.

<sup>458</sup> Letters from Hayward staff thank Kitaj and Sandra for their work on *The Human Clay* and National Gallery staff thank both for their contribution to *The Artist's Eye* (1980).

various Marlborough Fine Art staff should not be underestimated. For instance, it is worth noting that the gallery was very supportive of the pastels. Gilbert Lloyd, one of Marlborough's directors, writing to Kitaj in 1974, had this to say:

Stupidly, I forgot to tell you how much I love the two works on paper you gave us for the current exhibition of 20<sup>th</sup> century drawings and watercolours. They are a marvellous new development in your work and I hope that there will be many more works of this exciting nature.<sup>459</sup>

These events surely had a profound effect on Kitaj. However, this is not to say that they were the only or even the most significant fundamental reasons for his shift in artistic direction. One of the ingredients for some kind of change had been there for a while, for he seems to have been questioning both his own work and the main trends in contemporary art for some years, long before any stylistic shift became apparent. This manifests itself primarily as ambivalence towards Modernism, specifically a questioning of its direction and purpose, particularly with regard to audiences. One of the earliest published examples of this are his remarks to Maurice Tuchman, on the occasion of his first major show in an American museum, at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. 'I would like [art] to *do* more useful tasks than it's been doing. I would like it to subvert the outstanding prescriptions for what it ought to be.'<sup>460</sup>

The problem Kitaj seems to be trying to address here is the relationship between modern art ('art for art's sake') and the audience – more specifically, the non-specialist, general public. Perhaps the problem could be rephrased as 'art for whom'? As I will show, Kitaj was not alone in his uneasiness about the ever-broadening gulf between the avant-garde and the public. This is Kitaj's dilemma: he wants art to speak to (and for) a broad audience but the dominant art language is a kind of mandarin,

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<sup>459</sup> Gilbert Lloyd, letter to RB Kitaj dated 5<sup>th</sup> November 1974. UCLA, Kitaj Papers Box 67.

<sup>460</sup> Tuchman, *RB Kitaj*, pages unnumbered.

intelligible only to a few. We only have to recall his attitude towards the Lockheed technicians when they were working on *Lives of the Engineers*. He clearly felt an affinity for those men (however romanticised) but one is bound to wonder whether the objects they were creating together would have meant much to them without Kitaj around to explain his ideas. In other words, the art was unlikely to speak for itself, not at any rate in a way most people would understand. This desire to speak plainly may also tie in with his use of texts and notes. As discussed earlier, however, the effect of this for some commentators, such as David Peters Corbett and John Lynch, is that it can appear to be a neurotic desire to maintain control of the meaning.

Appropriately, Kitaj's ambivalence towards Modernism surfaces more explicitly on the occasion of Duchamp's exhibition, *The Almost Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp*, at the Tate Gallery in 1966. Whilst Duchamp was in London, Richard Hamilton organised a sort of summit or symposium of British artists and critics to meet him and discuss his work. Amongst those taking part were David Sylvester, Robert Melville, William Coldstream and Kitaj. The event was recorded and a transcript is kept in the archives of Philadelphia Museum of Art. It is Kitaj who opens proceedings by trying to tease out Duchamp's attitude towards the problem of 'art for art's sake':<sup>461</sup>

... I notice that you were unhappy at one time with what you call the gap between art and people. It's something I've often been unhappy about as well but I don't think we're talking about the same thing. For me this is exemplified by what you might call art for art's sake, and it's always seemed to me that what you've done and the likenesses that you have left even in your own lifetime provide a great alternative to autonomous art and your things cause an interference with the act of looking and the thing becomes less sacrosanct.

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<sup>461</sup> Typed transcript of discussion between Marcel Duchamp, RB Kitaj, Robert Melville, David Sylvester, William Coldstream, et al, p1. 1966. Philadelphia Museum of Art Archives.

Clearly, at this stage, Kitaj does not see Duchamp's work as art for art's sake. On the contrary, it is an 'alternative to autonomous art.' However, Duchamp does not altogether agree with Kitaj, who seems in effect to be arguing that pure abstraction alienates 'people', meaning the general public – hence 'the gap'. In fact, he does not really address Kitaj's point at all but, instead, rather gnomically maps out a position of his own:

... I am much more for the esoteric part of art than to become an esoteric form of expression; it leads nowhere but to publicity or things like that, which maybe augments the quantity but certainly reduces the quality.

The point is, I think, that for Duchamp it is that mysterious property by which an object becomes art (if that is what he is means by 'the esoteric part of art') not the manner (the 'form of expression') that is significant. This may be another way of articulating his dismissal of purely 'optical' art. So, Kitaj is saying most people do not understand avant garde forms of expression (exemplified as art for art's sake). And Duchamp parries this by saying he is not interested in the form but something altogether more complex and difficult to define. This does not mean he entirely disagrees with Kitaj, however. Where they do diverge is over Kitaj's assertion that the rift between artist and public is getting worse. On the contrary, says Duchamp

... after the Second World War [the public] love it, instead of refusing it or refusing to understand abstract art or abstract expression or abstract expressionism, instead of that, they absolutely not only accept it but expect it from the artist.

This is a debatable point. Expecting an artist to do abstract paintings is not the same as accepting it, plus it is not clear whether Duchamp's public is the same as Kitaj's. Kitaj almost certainly means a general audience rather than one which is art educated.

Still, Kitaj returns to his theme throughout the discussion without, it has to be said, resolving it (indeed the whole event is rather rambling and incoherent, though studded with illuminating remarks from Duchamp). I mention it because it illustrates a train of thought on Kitaj's part: a questioning of the relationship between avant-garde artists and their audience to which he returns when making his case for figurative art in the mid-1970s. What prompted this? One possible source, I suggest, is Edgar Wind, the man who introduced Kitaj to the ideas of Aby Warburg and the Warburg Institute. Although strictly speaking a Renaissance specialist Wind, unusually for the time, took a keen interest in contemporary art. In 1960 he delivered the BBC Reith Lectures under the general title *Art & Anarchy*. In the eponymous first lecture he discusses the sidelining of art:

It should be clear, then, that by moving into the margin art does not lose its quality as art; it only loses its direct relevance to our existence: it becomes a splendid superfluity.<sup>462</sup>

Kitaj had made reference to *Art & Anarchy* three years before *The Human Clay*.

Writing about Jim Dine for the catalogue of their joint exhibition at Cincinatti Art Museum, he was recalled how:

... Edgar Wind had written some sort of plea for a didactic art into his lectures and when I found the book ... in a kind of memorable lecture called THE FEAR OF KNOWLEDGE, Wind claims that, in the past, artistic imagination had been harnessed to precise and well-defined tasks of instruction and that a sharp edge of refinement could be gained by responding to the pressure of thought.<sup>463</sup>

By the time Kitaj came to devise the *Human Clay*, his personal doubts were being reflected in debates taking place in the wider art world. These were alluded to on

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<sup>462</sup> Edgar Wind, *Art & Anarchy*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (London: Duckworth, 1985), 10.

<sup>463</sup> RB Kitaj, 'By Mir Bist Du Schon' [sic] in Richard Boyle, *Dine: Kitaj* (Cincinatti: Cincinatti Art Museum, 1973), 6.



BBC Radio 4's arts magazine show, *Kaleidoscope*, on 23<sup>rd</sup> August 1976, during which presenter Tony Palmer reviewed the exhibition with critic Edward Lucie-Smith. Whilst Lucie-Smith had some sympathy with Kitaj's argument, he did not feel the exhibition makes a strong enough case. The title, both Lucie-Smith and Palmer agree, implies a grand survey of the human body in art, whereas the reality falls somewhat short of that ideal. Ultimately, for Lucie-Smith, the show is the result of the Arts Council choosing a very strong character with very strong opinions to buy for them on a very limited budget. But there follows an exchange in which Lucie-Smith puts his finger on essentially the same point Kitaj made when talking to Duchamp back in 1966.

Palmer: Do you think almost by default that the exhibition will rekindle an awareness of the difficulties involved in figurative drawing?

Smith: It depends on who you want to be aware. I think there is a real division here between the art world and it's one of the phenomena of our time that the art world has actually become a social entity as the intelligentsia became in Russia just before the Revolution and [...] people who just happen [to] like going [...] to look at art. I think people who like going to look at art always assumed that the main purpose of the artist was to reflect the visible world and that they are only surprised that the artists themselves seem to have forgotten it. With the art world on the other hand there has been an increasing tendency to want to make the work of art totally self-sufficient, an object, a coloured something, a shaped something which is added to a world of other objects and I think that tendency is too deeply seated to be shaken by one small show.<sup>464</sup>

A stark example of this 'real division between the art world ... and people who just happen to like going to look at art' had, in fact, made the headlines a few months earlier. On 15 February 1976, the Sunday Times published an article by Colin Simpson entitled 'The Tate Drops a Costly Brick', asking why the gallery had acquired a pile of bricks. The bricks in question were actually a minimalist sculpture,

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<sup>464</sup> Transcript: *Kaleidoscope*, BBC Radio 4, 2130hrs, 23/8/76. Arts Council Archive Files, Victoria & Albert Museum, Blythe House, *The Human Clay Exhibition* 28.9.76-5.3.78, ACG/121/511.

*Equivalent XVIII*, by the American sculptor Carl Andre. Inevitably, perhaps, the story spread like a bush fire through the press, resulting in over 1000 articles. Andre's sculpture, a set of 120 firebricks, was produced in 1966 and bought by Tate in 1972. It had been displayed twice before it suddenly became the centre of controversy. On the 23<sup>rd</sup> February, a member of the public went so far as to throw dye over the sculpture. Even the *Burlington Magazine*, a publication from which the Tate might reasonably have expected a little more supportive, weighed in, criticising the gallery for buying 'showy work which may well be regarded in a few decades as trash'.<sup>465</sup> In response, Sir Norman Reid, Tate's director, put pressure on the *Burlington's* editor, Benedict Nicolson, to allow Tate right of reply. After some grumbling, Nicolson reluctantly agreed to publish a four-page rebuttal by curator Richard Morphet (who, ironically, was to champion the School of London in the 1980s and, indeed, Kitaj himself in the 1990s). This finally appeared in the November edition of the *Burlington*. But, by then, the damage was done and the 'Tate Bricks' had entered public consciousness as a bye-word for art world charlatanry and credulity.

This was possibly the highest-profile case of anti-modernism of the 1970s and its legacy, though now inevitably diffuse, still lingers in some quarters. It was not the only example, though. Again in 1976, the ICA put on an exhibition of work by performance artists, musicians and all-round provocateurs Genesis P Orridge and Cosey Fanni Tutti, who worked together as COUM Transmissions. Called *Prostitution*, the show graphically documented Cosey's work in the porn industry. Unsurprisingly, the press had another howling fit and questions were asked in Parliament about the Arts Council's use of public money. According to Conservative MP, Nicholas Fairbairn, writing in the Daily Mail

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<sup>465</sup> Martin Bailey, 'Revealed: Secrets of the Tate Bricks' in *The Art Newspaper*, May 2011.

Public money is being wasted here to destroy the morality of society. These people are the wreckers of civilization...<sup>466</sup>

A somewhat less contentious exhibition held at the Serpentine Gallery in 1978, tapped into the debate from a different angle. Richard Cork's *Art for Whom?* looked at the work of artists such as Conrad Atkinson and others who attempted to circumvent the art world altogether and create new work through direct engagement with specific communities, rather than talking about vague notions such as 'the public'. In his introductory essay, Cork lined up his argument succinctly:

So much remains to be done in terms of deciding how far artists should take their cue from the public, how vital it is to retain the right to give the public something they might not at first want, and indeed how many different kinds of audience exist within the useful but deceptive cliché 'public' anyway.<sup>467</sup>

I mention these events at length because they provide useful context for *The Human Clay*. Extreme cases though some may well have been, they are indicative of the lack of comprehension many (including the *Burlington Magazine*, then one of the UK's leading art journals) felt about the more extreme manifestations of contemporary art. These are the circumstances Edward Lucie-Smith refers to. Kitaj did not do *The Human Clay* because of these particular events but, in so far as he was aware of them (though he was surely familiar with the Tate bricks brouhaha), they can only have emboldened him to make public his case for figurative art.

Kitaj's position was not an isolated one, of course. As I have already mentioned, Hockney was also a keen advocate of life-drawing. And Kitaj was not even the

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<sup>466</sup> <http://genesisorridgearchive.blogspot.co.uk/2011/05/coum-transmissions-write-up-by-tate.html?zx=6c2224653075143> accessed 16.02.2013.

<sup>467</sup> Richard Cork, *Art for Whom?* (London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1978), 9.

first to use the Arts Council Collection as a platform for his ideas. The previous year, the painter Patrick George bought for the collection and, like Kitaj after him, collected only figurative work. His purchases were then presented to the public in a show called simply *Drawings of People*. George's show must have been strikingly similar to *The Human Clay*. As the title makes clear, he concentrated on figure drawing, most of it by his contemporaries, including Auerbach and Kossoff. He even borrowed two pastels from Kitaj: the nude, *Femme du Peuple I* and the noiresque street scene, *Femme du Peuple II*. For the catalogue, he wrote a thoughtful and revealing essay about the practice of drawing, with observations on its relationship to photography, which clearly reflects his own approach.

Drawing to me means the management of almost anything that can leave a mark. The lead comes out of the end of the pencil leaving a trail across the page; a boat is 'drawn' up the beach and leaves a furrow in the sand. The dictionary says the word derives from the Old English 'dragan' which suggests drag – the pencil is dragged across the page.<sup>468</sup>

There is little polemical about this text. He is not trying to force a view on anybody. Even where he shows bias, for instance when comparing drawing with photography, the tone is ruminative, rather than challenging.

I do not understand why photographs always seem so nostalgic, why they remind me about how things 'used to be'. The instant the camera clicks the subject slips away into the past. Recently there was an exhibition of photographs called 'The Real Thing' but I feel more sympathy with an advertisement for Instamatic cameras that states 'memories are made of this'. Reality, whatever it is, is in the present. The artist attempting to draw what he sees, while he sees it, is always dealing with the now, even though the drawing may take a long time. The drawing may even show a moment in time but unlike a photograph it rarely begs the question of which year. Van Gogh's people are wearing overcoats a hundred years out of date but we do not notice

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<sup>468</sup> Patrick George, *Drawings of People: An Exhibition of Drawings Selected for the Arts Council* (London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1975), 4.

their old-fashioned clothes, rather we are reminded of the nature of the clothes we are wearing now.<sup>469</sup>

Nevertheless, two shows inside two years on the same subject indicates, if nothing else, fair mindedness on the part of the Arts Council and belies the idea, often put about, that figurative art was somehow neglected during this period. Just to reinforce the point, the Hayward mounted an exhibition devoted to the work of the then unfashionable Lucian Freud in 1974; Frank Auerbach would get the same treatment in 1978; and Michael Andrews in 1980.

If some, at least, of the internal drivers for Kitaj came from a longstanding ambivalence towards modernism, this more general concern for a return to the figure amongst fellow artists was in part prompted by a re-evaluation of the curriculum in the nation's art schools, which seemed to threaten the role of life-drawing.<sup>470</sup> Kitaj does not refer specifically to this debate and it is clear from his letter to Carol Hogben of the Victoria & Albert Museum, referred to earlier, that his motivation was deeply personal. However, his emphasis on life drawing being a test of skill and his frequent choice of student work for the collection and subsequent exhibition coincide with it.

Kitaj returned to this theme in his *Human Clay* catalogue essay:

The single human figure is a swell thing to draw. It seems to be almost impossible to do it as well as half a dozen blokes have in the past. I'm talking about skill and imagination that can be *seen to be done*. It is, to my way of thinking and in my own experience, the most difficult thing to do really well in the whole art. You don't have to believe me. It is there that the artist truly 'shows his hand' for me. It is then that I can share in the virtue of failed ambition and the downright revelation of skill. I thought it would not be such

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<sup>469</sup> George, *Drawings of People*, 6.

<sup>470</sup> Hyman, James, 'The Persistence of Painting: Contexts for British Figurative Painting, 1975-90' in *Blast to Freeze: British Art in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century* (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2002), 284, footnote 3.

a bad idea to assemble examples of these failures, not least because one is always being told how successful this thing is, or that thing is.<sup>471</sup>

He reiterated these sentiments in an interview with BBC Radio 4's arts magazine programme, *Kaleidoscope*. Asked by presenter Tony Palmer to explain the idea behind the show, he replied:

I have no doubt that most people are interested in people as I am and I assume you are. Let me ask you are you more interested in people or in stripes. I've been told by the Arts Council people that cleaning ladies and guards and many of the people who work there have taken an interest in this exhibition that they haven't taken in many of the previous exhibitions of contemporary artists, this does not surprise me and that alone does not make ... these pictures any more wonderful than any other contemporary art, but I do think it says a great deal.<sup>472</sup>

As will be clear, this is another iteration of the point he made with Duchamp. Also, we see him aligning himself again with 'the public'.

Of the artists whose work Kitaj acquired, many, especially those whose practice tended towards experimentation or abstraction, are represented by early, unrepresentative examples: Hamilton's *Self-Portrait* and Golding's figure drawings, for instance. There is something almost perverse in this, although it must be remembered that he was buying not borrowing the work and, undoubtedly, had a limited budget. Nevertheless, Kitaj attempted to rationalise his choices stating:

There are quite a few very early drawings by some of my favourite artists when they were teenagers because I wanted to see them and buy what I could for the collection. Someone once said that instead of quality following the new, the new will have to follow quality. These early drawings are like moral

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<sup>471</sup> Kitaj, *The Human Clay*, unpaginated.

<sup>472</sup> Kitaj, interviewed by Tony Palmer, *Kaleidoscope*, BBC Radio 4, 2130 hrs, 23<sup>rd</sup> August 1976. Arts Council Archive Files, *The Human Clay Exhibition* 28.9.76-5.3.78, ACGB/121/511, Victoria & Albert Museum, Blythe House.

contracts with an open past which will act upon new art and help determine quality and regeneration here.

But showing these items in this particular context misses the point by some miles that these people are worth looking at for the radicalism of their mature work not for their student exercises. Likewise, his admission that:

I would have liked to include more work by artists whose most ambitious work is abstract like the lovely things here by Golding, Turnbull, Caro and Kenneth Martin.

Unless, of course, Kitaj was trying to suggest that *they* were the ones who had missed the point. Robert Melville, in his assessment of the show written for *Architectural Review*, picks up on this suggestion:

Most of the things [Kitaj] has collected for the Arts Council show are drawings and a number of the artists are very well-known, but for the most part he has chosen early work quite unrelated to the styles with which they associated. They give me the impression that he is trying to imply that many of these artists have taken a wrong turning, especially the abstractionists – a couple of them, Scott and Golding, seem almost too obvious examples. He has collected many life drawings, but if he intended them to stand for a ‘call to order’ they would have been more effective if they had disclosed something beyond moderate talent.<sup>473</sup>

Lynda Morris, in her review for *The Listener*, puts her finger on an important point when she writes:

As an émigré from the land of opportunities, he surprisingly has forgotten that English artists welcomed American influence, as an antidote to their class-conscious culture.<sup>474</sup>

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<sup>473</sup> Robert Melville, ‘The Poetry of Ordinarity,’ in *Architectural Review*, November 1976, vol. 160, no. 957, 312-313.

<sup>474</sup> Lynda Morris, ‘The Human Clay’, *The Listener*, 19 August 1976.

But this begs the question of whether, as an American, he ever really understood the British class system or, for that matter, British culture generally. He certainly seems to have had his own doubts, remarking ruefully:

Instead of returning home to America, the Royal College would open a mysterious gray door to un-home in a Londontown I wanted to learn. Here in LA in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, I'm not sure I ever did learn London.<sup>475</sup>

When Kitaj came to England in the late-1950s, it was a country bewildered by the Second World War and its aftermath of rubbleheaps, dwindling international influence, a crumbling Empire, and the Cold War. Of course Hamilton, Paolozzi and Hockney, et al, countered this by embracing, more or less ironically, the brash assertiveness of American culture: it was forward looking, it was futuristic, it *was* the future. Britain, in contrast, was clinging to the wreckage. But Kitaj seems to have been, like Frank Auerbach, 'born old'.<sup>476</sup> He was not interested in this future of coca cola and canned soups and pop stars. He was looking back, nostalgically, to the lost Europe of Warburg, Benjamin and Pound, back to the historical moment of Modernism (even as he questioned its legacies) rather than the truly modern – ie, contemporary – world around him. As he grouchily observes with his opening sentence: 'I have felt very out of sorts with my time'.<sup>477</sup> Equally to the point, of course, he *was* American.

One may also note that *The Human Clay* is not just an apologia for figurative art (after all, he explicitly acknowledges 'my friends of the abstract persuasion') but for

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<sup>475</sup> Kitaj, *Confessions*, 42. UCLA, RB Kitaj Papers (Collection 1741) Box 5, Folder 1.

<sup>476</sup> Frank Auerbach cited in Catherine Lampert, *Frank Auerbach*, (London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1978), 21.

<sup>477</sup> Kitaj, *The Human Clay*, unpaginated.



painting itself. 'Don't listen to the fools who say either that pictures of people can be of no consequence or that painting is finished. There is much to be done.'<sup>478</sup>

Which brings us back to his argument with Duchamp ten years earlier. 'If some of us wish to practice an art for art's sake alone, so be it...' he writes:

But good pictures, great pictures, will be made to which many modest lives respond. When I'm told that good art has never been like that, I doubt it and in any case, it seems to me at least as advanced or radical to attempt a more social art as not to.

A dream of 'a more social art,' then, which appeals to 'modest lives' is I suspect at the back of this. Unfortunately, it is hard to accept that the work presented in *The Human Clay* or, for that matter, in his own practice really addressed this ambition. Of course, there were artists active at this time who really were attempting to reconnect the art world with 'modest lives' whilst trying to use a contemporary mode of image making. Stephen Willats (born 1943) for instance, who does not feature amongst Kitaj's select band, but who was included in Cork's *Art for Whom?* had been working with inner-city communities since the 1960s, creating multi-disciplinary participatory art from the issues and concerns affecting their lives. In *Working Within a Defined Context*, of 1978, for instance, the self-contained world of the London Docks is used as a symbol for all deterministic working processes but is countered with symbols of the individualism whereby people relieve the formal routines and structures of work. *Working Within a Defined Context* was developed from photographs made in the West India Dock with the co-operation of the Port of London Authority. In addition, tape recordings were made with dockers, who describe their role in the workings of the dockyard. Willats' methods are unlikely to have satisfied Kitaj. In fact, he

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<sup>478</sup> Kitaj, *The Human Clay*, unpaginated.

included only one photographer in *The Human Clay*, and that was Nigel Henderson, a former member, along with Hamilton and Eduardo Paolozzi, of the Independent Group during the 1950s.

The tension in Kitaj's position is that, despite his affinity for working people and their circumstances, and his no doubt genuine desire for a more social art, his own work was too rooted within a self-referential artist/dealer/collector art market for him to really take the risk urged on him by his own polemic. Anyone can make an icon out of Rosa Luxemburg or Durutti thirty to forty years after the fact but in the 1970s, at least, it took a very determined artist to make an icon out of a contemporary docker. None of this would matter if it were not for Kitaj's own insistence on it. And the material he gathered together to buttress his apologia simply fails to support it.

### School of London

Kitaj sets out the thinking behind the show in the catalogue essay. This was the longest published statement he made until *The First Diasporist Manifesto* appeared in 1990/1, and yet it is hardly ever quoted from, except for one passage. This is it:

The bottom line is that there are artistic personalities in this small island more unique and strong and I think numerous than anywhere in the world outside America's jolting artistic vigour. There are ten or more people in this town, or not far away, of world class, including my friends of the abstract persuasion. In fact, I think there is a substantial School of London (with lines in this exhibition from Much Hadham, Edinburgh, Durham and the Brotherhood of Ruralists).<sup>479</sup>

The coining of the term School of London has been contested. Lawrence Gowing, for instance, claimed ownership at one point. In fact, if anyone can claim the honour it is

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<sup>479</sup> Kitaj, *The Human Clay*, unpaginated.

David Sylvester. In *The Battle for Realism*, his study of the debates around British figurative art post-Second World War, James Hyman reveals how, in 1948, Sylvester published a three-part overview of the state of art entitled *The Problems of Painting: Paris-London 1947* in the French journal *L'Age nouveau*.<sup>480</sup> This text, which Hyman argues was the critic's most substantial early essay, champions younger British artists and proposes a School of London, which should be given equivalent status to l'Ecole de Paris. The artists Sylvester put forward included Moore, Bacon, Sutherland, Nicholson, Hepworth, Lowry, and Paolozzi, as well as émigrés such as Kokoschka and Adler.<sup>481</sup> Two years later, he again used the term 'School of London' in the course of a review.<sup>482</sup> But he was not alone, for in 1949, Patrick Heron published an article entitled, simply, 'The School of London', in *The New Statesman*.<sup>483</sup> Heron, despite being a committed abstract painter, applied the term to a broad group of British artists. Although it is far shorter, and more focused, the parallels between Heron's text and Kitaj's are striking enough:

The time has come when it is no longer meaningless to speak about the modern School of London. Something like the beginnings of a renaissance in the visual arts in this country is now evident beyond doubt – though one might hear more discussion of it in Paris or New York than in London. Slowly we are producing a tiny group of artists of first rate intelligence ... There is no marked similarity of style between them. The School of London is remarkable for its variety. It includes, of course, artists who live remote from London and whose attachment to a region is vital to their art. Such artists still make their names in London.<sup>484</sup>

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<sup>480</sup> James Hyman, *The Battle for Realism: Figurative Art in Britain during the Cold War 1945-1960* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2001), 24.

<sup>481</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>482</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>483</sup> Patrick Heron, 'The School of London', in *The New Statesman and Nation*, vol. XXXVII, no. 944, April 9, 1949, 351.

<sup>484</sup> *Ibid.*, 351.

Heron sees the antecedents of his proposed school being people such as Wyndham Lewis and Graham Sutherland, as well as Nicholson, Hepworth and other St Ives artists. However, he goes on to say:

The brilliant individuals I have just mentioned are all a little isolated from one another; the painters in their twenties or thirties I must now add to the company of all those comprising the School of London are possibly nearer together in thought. In spite of much that is purely personal in each of them, there seems more in the way of a common feeling, at any rate among certain groups: for instance, MacBryde, Colquhoun, Minton, Vaughan and Craxton. Less linked in any way are Pasmore, Coldstream, Ryan, le Brocqy, Freud, Bacon, Piper and David Jones. Yet all contribute to the rising School – as did Paul Nash, Frances Hodgkin and Christopher Wood.<sup>485</sup>

Since it was being proposed by two of Britain's leading younger critics, it seems the School of London idea had some currency in the late-1940s. However, whether Kitaj knew of Heron's text or, indeed, Sylvester's, we cannot be sure. He was not in Europe, let alone London, in 1948-49. But he was acutely aware of Modernist art history and debates, so terms like School of Paris and New York School would have been very familiar to him. It would not have taken a great leap of the imagination for him to independently propose the term School of London. On the other hand, he could easily have stumbled across it, or had it pointed out to him, precisely because of his fascination with Modernist debate – and, equally, one might add, with Socialism, for *The New Statesman* was and still is on the Left. But we just do not know. It is, though, worth noting that one of the magazine's contributors at this time, in addition to Heron, was the young David Sylvester. However, as Hyman points out, Sylvester did not include his *L'Age nouveau* article in the major anthology of his writing, *About Modern Art*, nor did he refer to his proposal of a School of London in his autobiographical essay, *Curriculum Vitae*. Indeed, he did not even mention his own

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<sup>485</sup> Heron, *The New Statesman*, 351.

early use of the term when Hyman questioned him directly about the idea of a School of London.<sup>486</sup>

In his *Human Clay* essay Kitaj makes the obscure point that ‘only five of the 35 artists from whom we purchased were shown at Milan’.<sup>487</sup> One imagines that such a remark, unreferenced as it is, would have seemed a little opaque to most readers even in 1976. In fact, it is a swipe at *Arte inglese oggi 1960-1976*, a major exhibition organised by Norbert Lynton for the Palazzo Reale, Milan. This show aimed to present the full range of developments in British art since 1960. Kitaj was amongst the artists included. All were asked to provide a brief statement about their work for the catalogue. It is worth quoting Kitaj’s text in its entirety.

Italians, here is a short lecture: treat this exhibition with caution. Degas wrote of Parisian art life, “There is too much going on” and now the demands of internationalist fashion have corrupted our art life so that a nation must be represented abroad by reflecting every aspect of modernist fragmentation ... a new academy, a new establishment disguised as an avant guard [sic]. As a result of this barren situation you will not see some of the finest painters in England ... Frank Auerbach and Lucian Freud, to name only two. Some of my fellow painters here will agree with me. In fact, I am only here myself because a few of my comrade painters insisted on it. I was told the Italians do not care much for painters of the human figure! I do not believe it! My own dreams and aspirations find their own greatest inspiration in Italian figure painting and I don’t care a damn that those figures were invented 500 years ago instead of last week. It is no coincidence that the two greatest artists of our epoch, Picasso and Matisse, were also the two greatest draughtsmen of the human face and figure in our time.

People are now looking to Italy because of the extraordinary and moving political discussion going on there. I wish you luck and look forward to the day when our art is delivered from the moribund legacies of a once heroic modernism. Great reforms are in the air and I hope that our art may be brought back from the trivial margins of society into the social heartland.<sup>488</sup>

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<sup>486</sup> Hyman, *The Battle for Realism*, footnote 111.

<sup>487</sup> Kitaj, *The Human Clay*, unpaginated.

<sup>488</sup> RB Kitaj, statement in Lynton, *Arte inglese oggi 1960-76*, 128.

As for those ‘moribund legacies of modernism’, Kitaj had been exploring them (and re-energising them) in his work for years. But this is a far more dismissive assessment of the state of art than he was prepared to give ten years earlier. Striking also is the use of words. Bringing art ‘back from the trivial margins of society into the social heartland’ has clear echoes of Edgar Wind’s remarks on the marginalization of art quoted earlier in this chapter.

Hockney, in his catalogue statement for Milan, quotes the very lines from Auden’s *Letter to Lord Byron* that Kitaj, in the spirit of comradeship, was to use as the title of his own upcoming exhibition.<sup>489</sup> One is bound to wonder, in fact, if that was the point when he first saw its potential. But, then, the spirit of Auden drifts through much of Kitaj’s work even at this point – the history of the Left, 1930s Weimar Germany, the Spanish Civil War, as has been shown permeate the paintings and screenprints.

Hockney and Kitaj had, of course, both been concerned with a return to figure drawing for some time. In 1977, they took to the battlements once again, appearing naked on the cover of *The New Review* – though Kitaj retained his vest and socks – whilst, inside the journal, arguing for an art which depicted people. This article, actually a conversation between the two, is as James Hyman characterises it ‘reactionary in tone’ revealing ‘deep mistrust of the notion of progress, a questioning of modernism and an advocacy of rigorous life drawing’.<sup>490</sup> All that notwithstanding, the cheekiness of the cover image belies the charge of worthiness or earnestness and reminds us that both men emerged from Pop, whatever their subsequent reservations about the term.

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<sup>489</sup> David Hockney, statement in Lynton, *Arte inglese oggi 1960-76*, 98.

<sup>490</sup> James Hyman, ‘The Persistence of Painting’ in *Blast to Freeze: British Art in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century* (Wolfsburg: Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg, Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2002), 255.

## CONCLUSION

I have dealt with a number of Europe related themes across this thesis. These include: Kitaj's nostalgia or lament for a vanished Modernist Europe; his interest in the work of Aby Warburg and the meaning of images; and his engagement with and development of Jewish themes.

Kitaj's family, including that of his step-father, provided a richly European background to his childhood and youth. His natural parents both had Eastern European Jewish heritage. His stepfather and step-grandmother were Jewish refugees who had fled Vienna to escape the Nazis. This, along with his early interest in art and literature, which included Americans such as Pound, Eliot and Hemingway, writers who had spent time in Europe, undoubtedly helped foster his own ambitions for an artistic life in Europe.

The ultimate destination to his first trip in 1950 was, at the suggestion of his step-grandmother, Helene Kitaj, the city of Vienna. He went there with the aim of studying at the Akademie der Bildenden Künste, which had fostered talents like Klimt, Kokoschka and Schiele. With the theme to the *Third Man* twanging on his internal soundtrack, he dreamed of meeting 'a Valli or a Moira Shearer'. What he encountered was a divided city, still bearing the scars of war, trying to come to terms with the legacy of Nazism, and resentful of the occupying powers. And his almost unwitting attraction to Jewish themes appears to begin at that early point, embodied by his association with the Austrian, Jewish, Roman Catholic priest, Leopold Ungar (a more Kitaj-esque figure would be hard to imagine). It is the atmosphere of this Vienna which permeates the early screenprint *Acheson Go Home*.

Spain, unlike Vienna, obviously proved more congenial to him. Again, his family milieu, along with Hemingway, had provided him with a framing myth for the country, the Spanish Civil War. This found expression in a number of his most significant early-paintings, including *Specimen Musings of a Democrat* and *Kennst Du das Land?* The specific history with which they deal is amalgamated into a broader historical interest in the European Left. He gave this further expression in paintings such as *The Murder of Rosa Luxemburg*. However, in that canvas his real concern, it seems to me, is not with Left history but with cultural history and the ease with which civilisation can slide into barbarism. A highly civilised society with a deeply sophisticated and advanced culture is still capable of atrocities. The making of this picture coincided with the Eichmann Trial and the subsequent opening up, as it were, of the Holocaust as an event that the World needed to face.

At around the same time, the early 1960s, Kitaj began to experiment with screenprinting. This, it appears, gave him an opportunity to develop ideas quickly, unlike the slower more formal medium of painting. The prints show him playing with themes derived from Aby Warburg, from recent European history, including the Second World War, and formally with the aesthetics of Modernist abstraction. This use of non-figurative elements tends towards the examples of Mondrian and Russian Suprematism. The latter has a direct relation to the revolutionary politics and events in Eastern Europe, from which his own family originated. The idealism of both the politics and the art is, I feel, ironized in Kitaj's work by his abrupt abuttal of abstraction with figurative elements which relate to the brutality which followed. Again, as is the case with *The Murder of Rosa Luxemburg*, the screenprints explore interlinked themes in order to develop complex meditations on the contrast between



the idealism and the reality at the heart of recent European history, art, ideas and culture.

This was taken further, though with a shift of focus, in the *Lives of the Engineers* installation at Los Angeles County Museum of Art. In this case, insofar as we can reconstruct it, the interplay of ideas is around the implications of the Industrial Revolution (which marks the beginning of technologically advanced Modernity) in the almost Baumanesque sense of the negative impacts this advance had on people. The use of quotes from Samuel Smiles' *Self Help* in this context is clearly ironic. The project is notable for Kitaj's use of Klingender's *Art and the Industrial Revolution* as a source book. Although Kitaj did not refer to *Lives of the Engineers* again after 1970, publicly at least, its source iconography stayed with him to be manifested in such works as *If Not, Not*. In this work the artist began to treat the Holocaust in a more direct way, hence his allusion to Auschwitz, but he still preferred to make broader statements about the brutality at the heart of supposedly advanced 20<sup>th</sup> century society. In the interview with Timothy Hyman published in the Hirshhorn exhibition catalogue he makes is explicit on this point

I'd like to try, not only to do Cézanne and Degas over again after Surrealism, but after Auschwitz, after Gulag (et al).<sup>491</sup>

His inclusion of the Gulags *et al* – and other, similar things – on this list is evidence of a desire to treat a broad range of the historical atrocities that developed out of, or were made possible by the industrialised European societies of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>491</sup> Kitaj in Shannon, *RB Kitaj: Paintings, Drawings, Pastels*, 46. As Aaron Rosen points out, Kitaj later revised this remark, deleting 'Gulag (et al)' thus making 'his art revolve around a more specifically Jewish problem'. See Aaron Rosen, *Imagining Jewish Art: Encounters with the Masters in Chagall, Guston, and Kitaj* (London: Legenda, 2009), 99, footnote 32.

centuries. His canvas *If Not, Not*, which has some claim to being his major statement, enmeshes the Arcadian pool of Giorgione's *Tempest*, within the industrial sublime of de Louthembourg's *Coalbrookdale by Night*, the suppression of the Proletariat in Pudovkin's *The Mother*, and I suggest the visuals of the Vietnam War, to create a bleak, Apocalyptic meditation on the history of Modern Europe. Even if Vietnam seems today a specifically American problem, it should be remembered that at least one cause of the conflict developed from the untidy unravelling of European colonialism.<sup>492</sup>

In his allegiances to such diverse figures as Warburg and Cézanne, his espousal of figurative drawing and proselytising for figurative art can be seen as an attempt to seek the reassurance of the European canon. It is, perhaps, telling that his last major project of the 1960s, *Lives of the Engineers*, was his most formally experimental. Subsequently, he takes a step back, as did several of his contemporaries, Hockney chief amongst them, and shores up the foundations of his art by a renewed interest in life-drawing.

And yet, the abiding interest in the meaning and reading of images, derived ultimately from Warburg, remains with him. He continues to associate texts with his work, to append new titles, long after the paint had dried. This constant reworking and rethinking, is a tendency that has troubled some commentators. However, in today's multimedia world, the idea of ongoing dialogue between artist, work and public, of changing meanings, changing readings, of the work of art as a work in progress, does not seem so odd. In this respect, Kitaj's methods seem tantalisingly prescient. The

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<sup>492</sup> Francis Ford Coppola's 2001 *Apocalypse Now Redux* includes an extended scene, cut from the first theatrical release in 1979, in which Captain Willard and his men encounter a family of French rubber-plantation owners left over from the French-Indochina War.

painting *A Desk Murderer* (fig. 88), for instance, is a good example of this. The canvas acquired its present title after almost a decade. Its production dates, as recorded by Marco Livingstone, reflect this: 1970-84. Kitaj initially called it *Third Department (A Teste Study)*. Reading of the death of a Nazi bureaucrat led him to connect this apparently straightforward interior with the administration that lay behind the Holocaust. Arguably, it is in this canvas, interlinking administration with the Shoah, that his work shows its closest affinities with Bauman's view of Modernity and the Holocaust. In the middle of the canvas is a small panel showing a curious chimney-like structure, emitting thick smoke.

Kitaj was not a systematic thinker. He changed his mind, but even then it did not always result in a clear-cut decision. Consider the way in which *Lives of the Engineers* effectively vanished from the record. He never showed even the remaining parts of it in retrospective exhibitions and, at the end of his life, dismissed it as 'junk'.<sup>493</sup> It appears in no publication other than the *Art & Technology Report* itself. And yet he sought, on no less than two separate occasions, to deposit major components from the installation at the Tate Gallery, the national gallery of Modern and British Art. The second time happened to coincide with his most public statement on the need for a return to figuration, *The Human Clay*, no less. In the event, as I have shown, two pieces went to leading European modern and contemporary art museums. And, tellingly, he even kept one smaller piece, *Black Mountain*, for himself and only parted with it when he was leaving England for Los Angeles. Despite the seeming dogmatism, in other words, he was not sure. This troubled him, perhaps, but the friction created between his passionate engagement on the one hand and his uncertainty on the other gives his work heat.

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<sup>493</sup> Lambirth, *Kitaj*, 137.

In his aims and ambitions for his work, Kitaj I think very much resembled Francis Bacon. In a letter to Sonia Orwell dated 13<sup>th</sup> December 1954, Bacon outlined his ideas for an experimental autobiography, ‘a very personal history of everything that has happened since I can remember anything’:

If I did the history I would like to do it with photographs and have already got through collecting them over years but I think a sort of life story which sees underneath of the events of the last 40 years so that you would not know whether it was imagination or fact is what I could do as the photographs themselves of events could be distorted into a personal private meaning [...] perhaps we could make something nearer to facts truer – and more exciting as though one were seeing the story of one’s time for the first time...<sup>494</sup>

This idea was never realised in book form but, arguably, something of its spirit informs Bacon’s paintings, especially the large triptychs. I also think that a similar ambition lies behind Kitaj’s work. He draws on a multiplicity of sources: photography, film, literature, art and history, and distorts them into a personal, private meaning in an attempt to see ‘the story of one’s time’.

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<sup>494</sup> Cited in Martin Hammer, *Bacon and Sutherland* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2005), 97-98.

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**RB KITAJ AND THE IDEA OF EUROPE**

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**Doctor of Philosophy**

**University of Sussex**

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**Volume II**

**IMAGES**



Fig. 1. *Monsignor Ungar*, oil on canvas, 1958 (private collection)



Fig. 2. RB Kitaj & Eduardo Paolozzi, *Work in Progress*, paper and tin collage in painted wooden frame, 1962 (Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, Edinburgh)



Fig. 3. *The Bells of Hell*, oil on canvas, 1960 (private collection)



Fig. 4. Red Horse, *Pictographic account of the Battle of the Little Bighorn*, graphite, coloured pencil and ink on paper, 1881 (Smithsonian Institution)



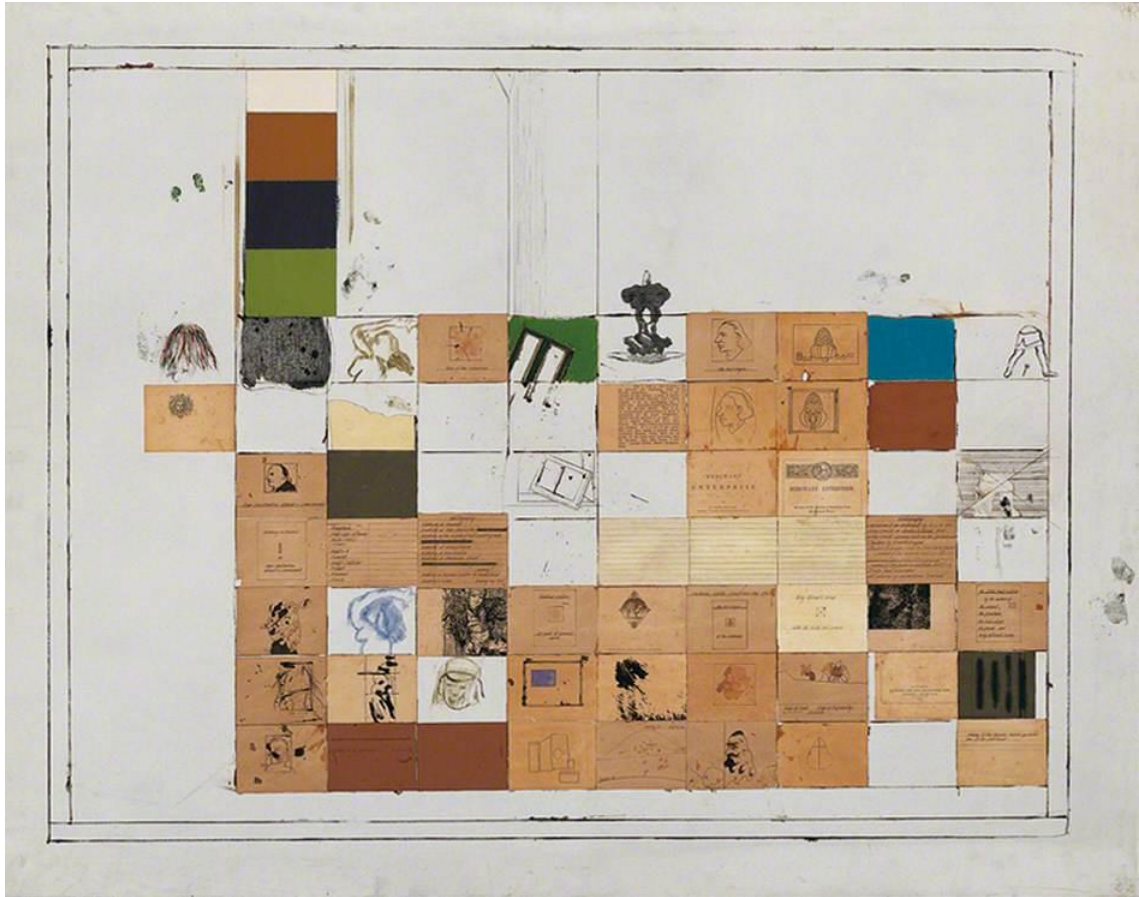


Fig. 5. *Specimen Musings of Democrat*, oil on canvas, 1960  
(Pallant House Art Gallery, Chichester)



Fig. 6. *Erasmus Variations*, oil on canvas, 1958, (Tate Gallery)





Fig. 7. *Junta*, oil on canvas, 1962 (private collection)



Fig. 8. *Junta*, detail of Orsini bomb and portrait of Durutti.





Fig 9. Orsini bomb, 1893, (Barcelona City History Museum)



Fig. 10. *Kennst du das Land?* oil and collage on canvas, 1962

(Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid)



Fig. 11. HG Cardozo, 'Nationalists advancing in the suburbs of Madrid', in *The March of a Nation. My Year of Spain's Civil War*, (London: The Right Book Club, 1937), Plate 11.



Fig. 12. *To Live in Peace (The Singers)*, oil on canvas, 1973-4 (private collection)





Fig. 13. *The Murder of Rosa Luxemburg*, oil and collage on canvas, 1960 (Tate Gallery)



Fig. 14. *The Red Banquet*, oil and collage on canvas, 1960  
(Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool)



Fig. 15. Eugen Schoenebeck, *Das Kreuz*, oil on canvas, 1963





Fig. 16. Field-Marshal Helmut Graf von Moltke.



Fig. 17. Johannes Schilling, *Germania*, bronze, Niederwald Monument, 1871-83



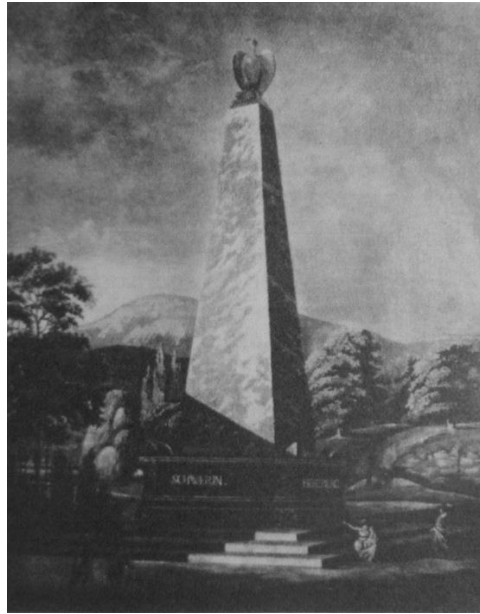


Fig. 18. Janus Genelli, *Monument to Kant*, watercolour, 1808

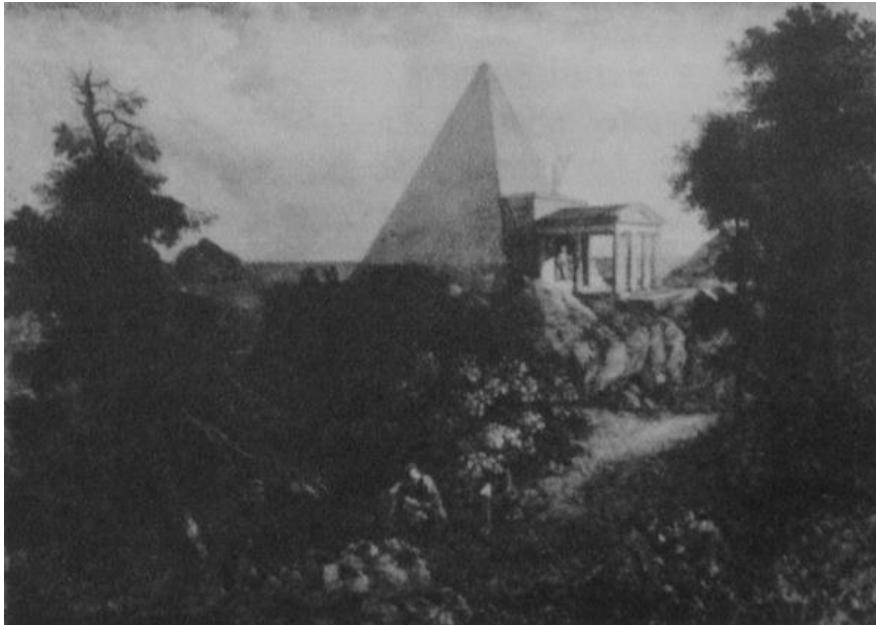


Fig. 19. H Dannecker, *Monument to Frederick the Great and his Generals*, aquatint



Fig. 20. George Carter, *Apotheosis of Garrick*, oil on canvas, c.1782

(Royal Shakespeare Company Collection)

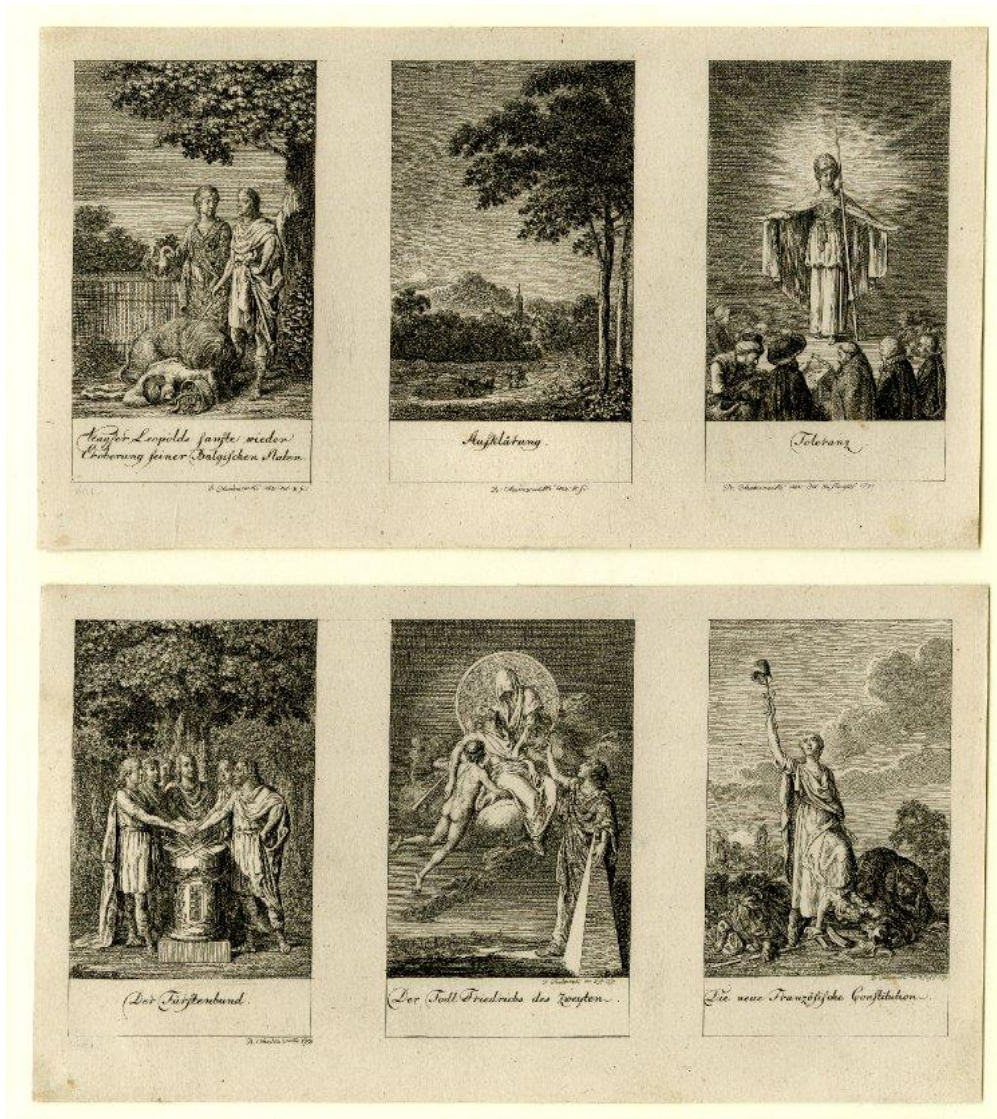


Fig. 21. Daniel Nikolaus Chodowiecki, *Apotheosis of Frederick the Great*, engraving, 1791



Fig. 22. Benjamin Franklin, *Join or Die*, engraving, 1754.



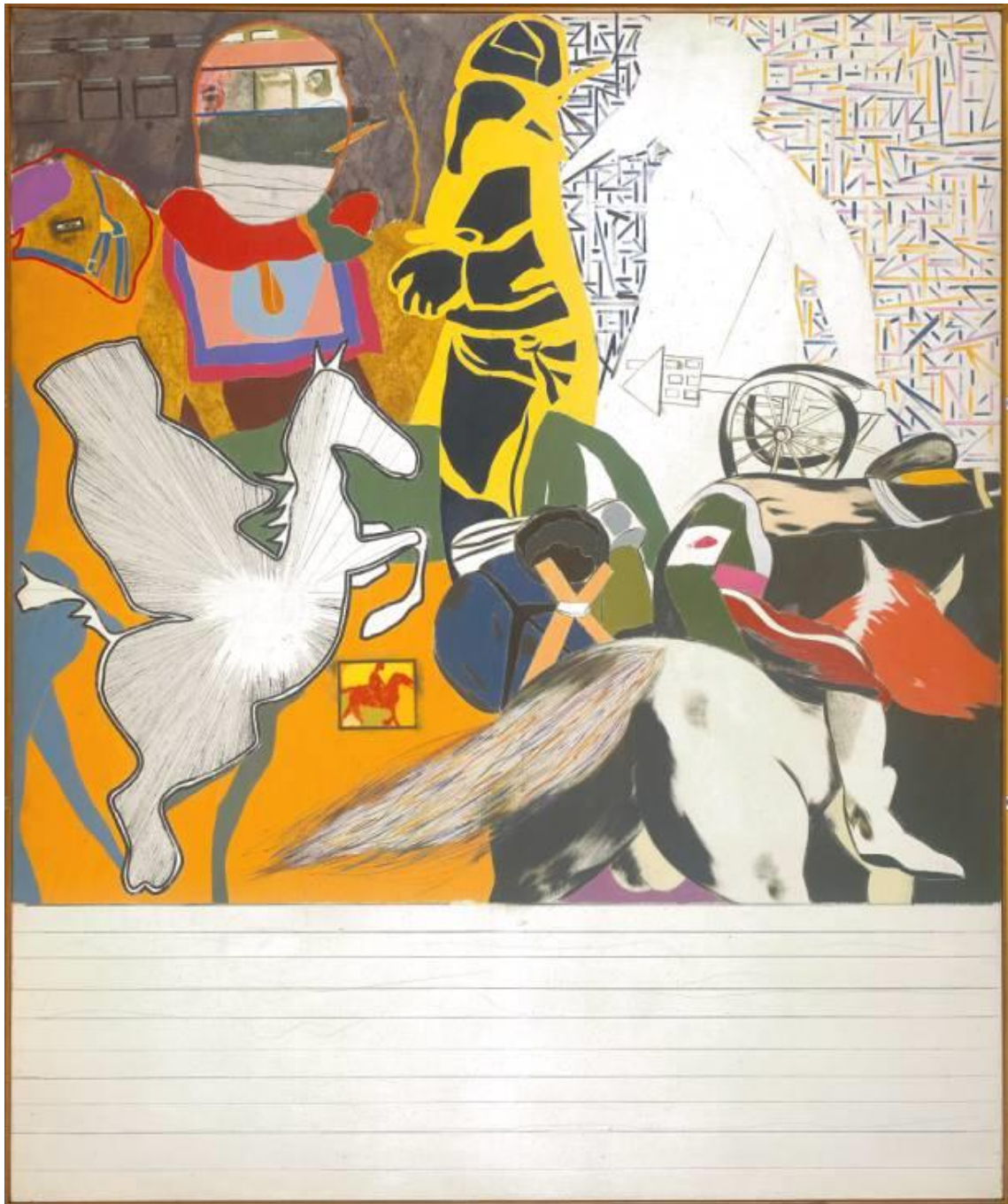


Fig. 23. *Isaac Babel Riding with Budyonny*, oil on canvas, 1962 (Tate Gallery)



Fig. 24. Georg Grosz, *John, der Frauenmörder*, oil on canvas, 1918

(Hamburger Kunsthalle)



Fig. 25. Heinrich Maria Davringhausen, *Der Lustmörder*, oil on canvas, 1917  
(Pinakothek der Moderne, Munich)





Fig. 26. Michael Powell, *Peeping Tom*, 1960

*R.D. Kitaj proof for Clunie 1969*





Fig. 28. *Good News for Incunabulists*, oil and collage on canvas, 1962  
(private collection, Germany)



Fig. 29. *Dismantling the Red Tent*, oil and collage on canvas, 1964

(Michael and Dorothy Blankfort Collection at Los Angeles County Museum of Art)





Fig. 30. *The Ohio Gang*, oil on canvas, 1964 (Museum of Modern Art, New York)



Fig. 31. *The Defects of its Qualities*, screenprint with collage, 1967-8



Fig. 32. Michael Andrews, proof sheet for *Accident*, screenprint, c 1968  
(private collection)





Fig. 33. *Ctric News Topi*, screenprint with collage, 1968



Fig. 34. *Yaller Bird*, screenprint, 1964







Fig. 36. Kitaj's Los Angeles studio with images by Mondrian and others tacked to the wall.



Fig. 37. *Star Betelgeuse*, from the series *Some Poets*, screenprint with collage, 1967



for three (unq.) A. P. Kistaj 1965

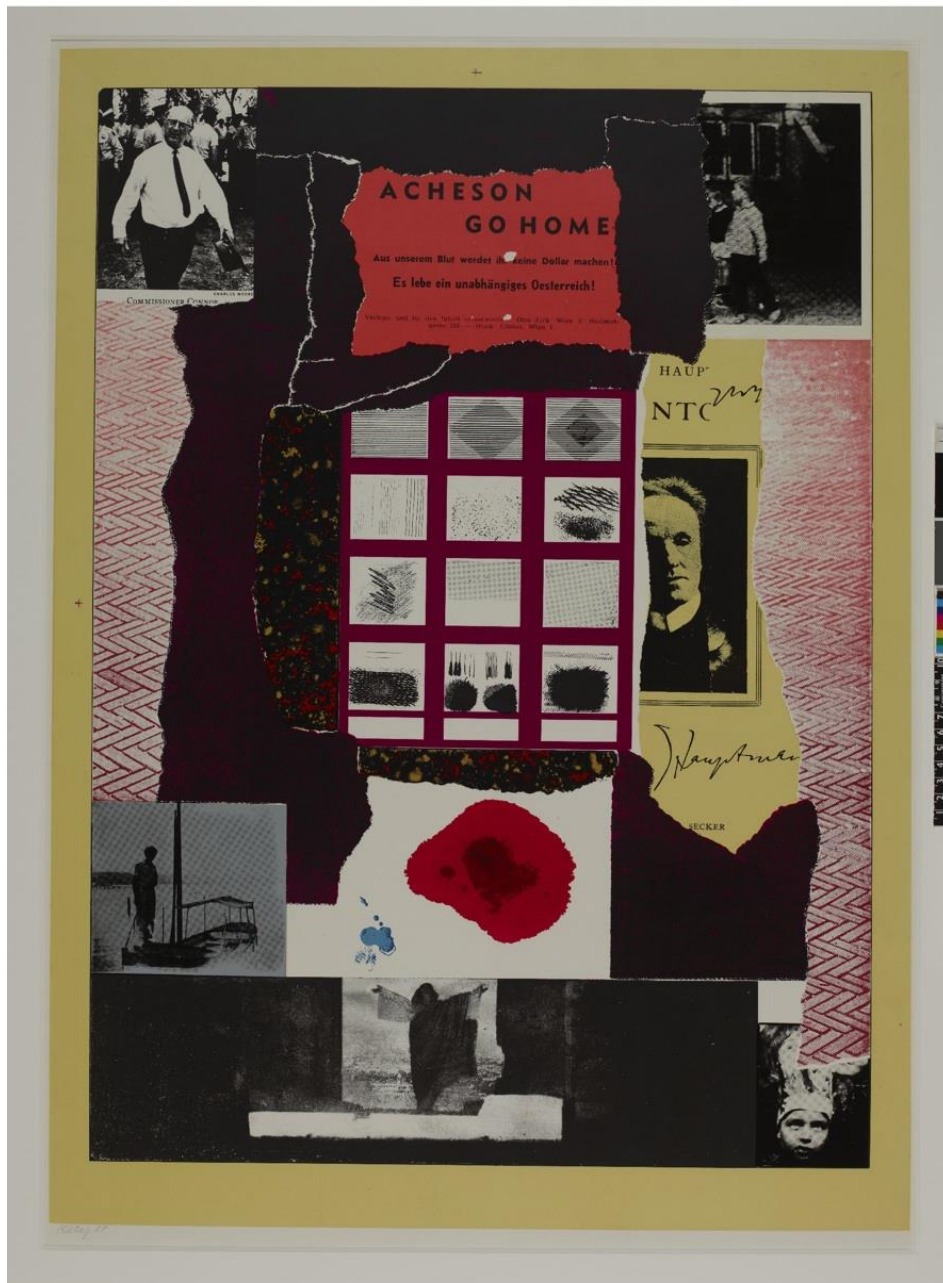


Fig. 39. *Acheson Go Home*, screenprint, 1964



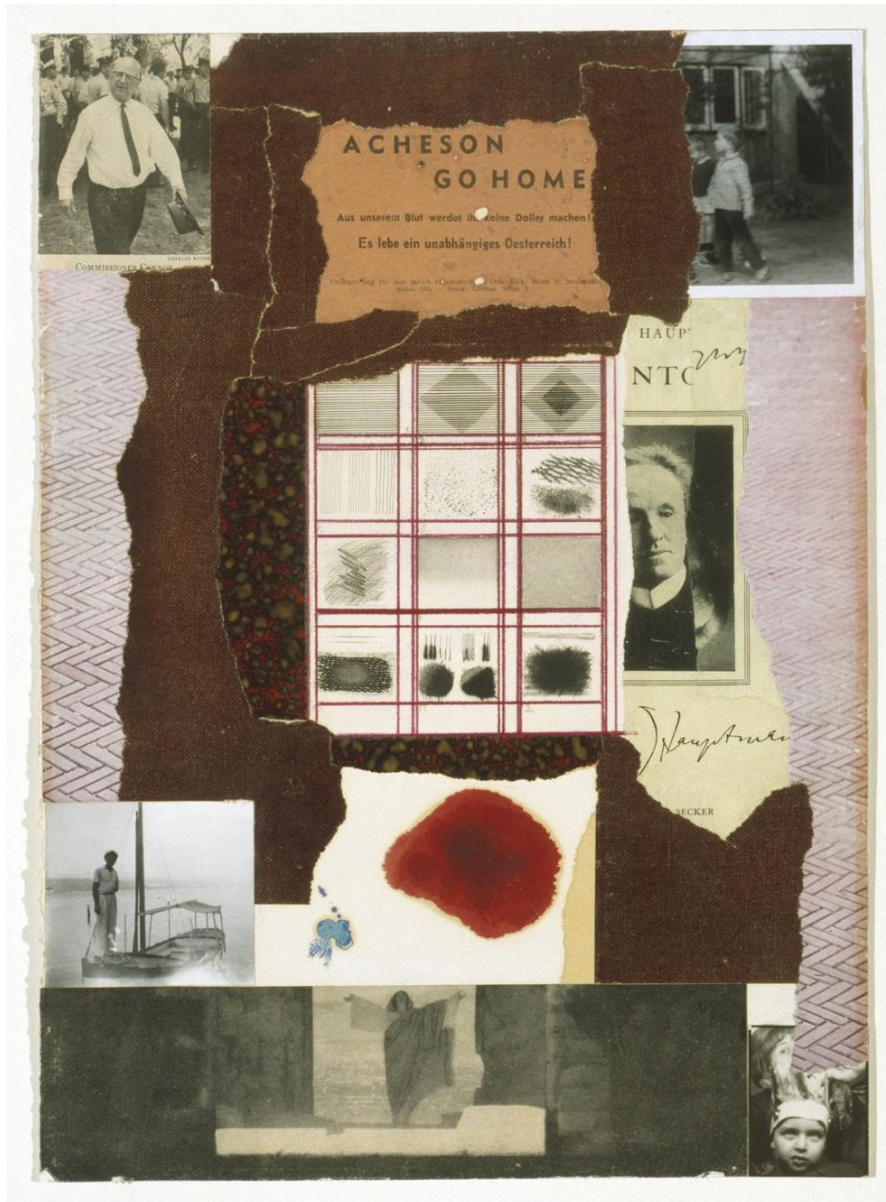


Fig. 40. *Acheson Go Home*, collage on paper, c.1963 (Victoria & Albert Museum)



Fig. 41. *Go and Get Killed Comrade, We Need a Byron in the Movement*, from the series *Mahler Becomes Politics*, Beisbol, screenprint, 1964-7

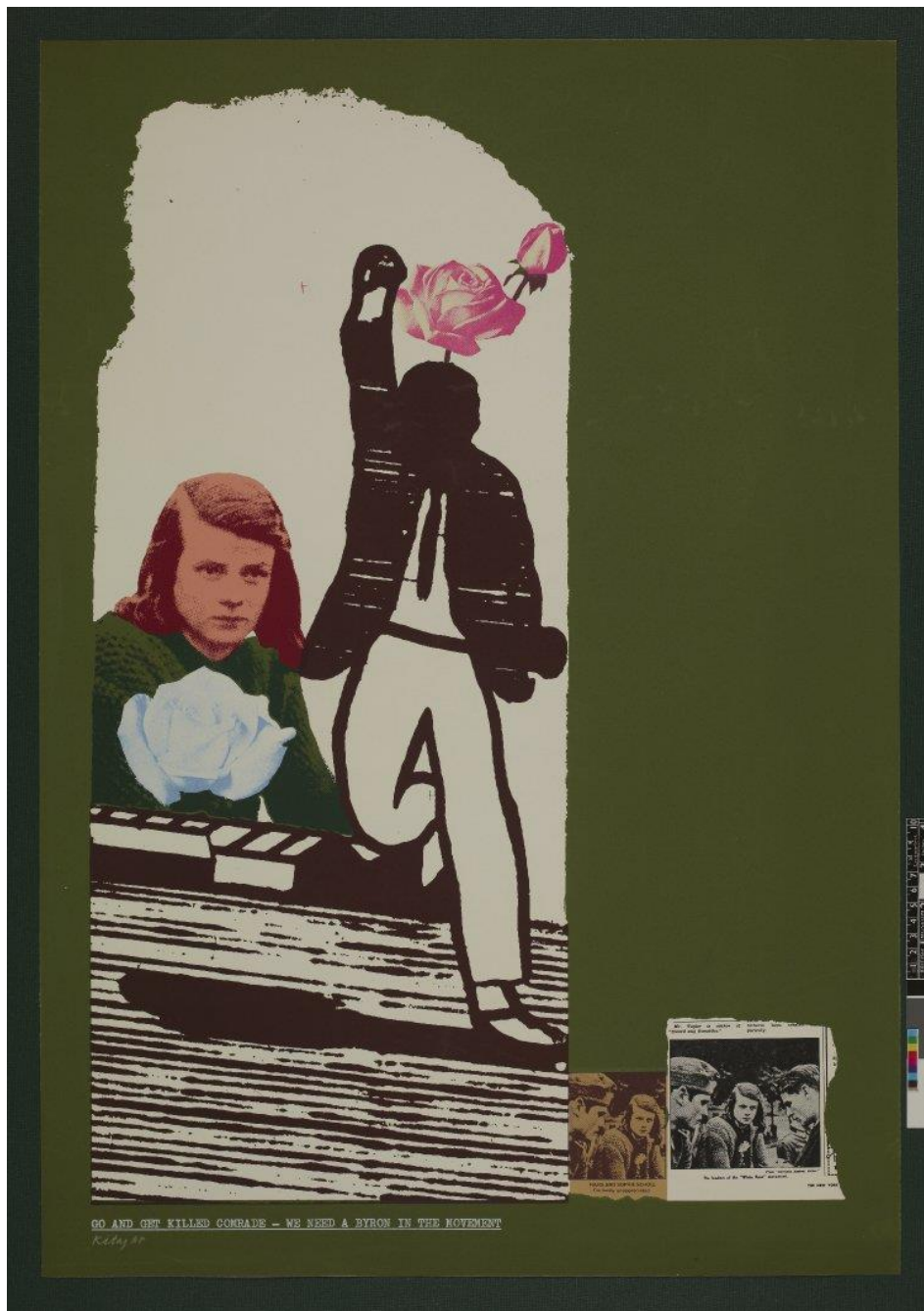


Fig. 42. *Go and Get Killed Comrade, We Need a Byron in the Movement*, from the series *Mahler Becomes Politics, Beisbol*, screenprint, 1964-7, alternative version, not edited (British Museum)





Fig. 43. *The Cultural Value of Fear, Distrust and Hypochondria*, from the series *Mahler Becomes Politics, Beisbol*, screenprint, 1964-7



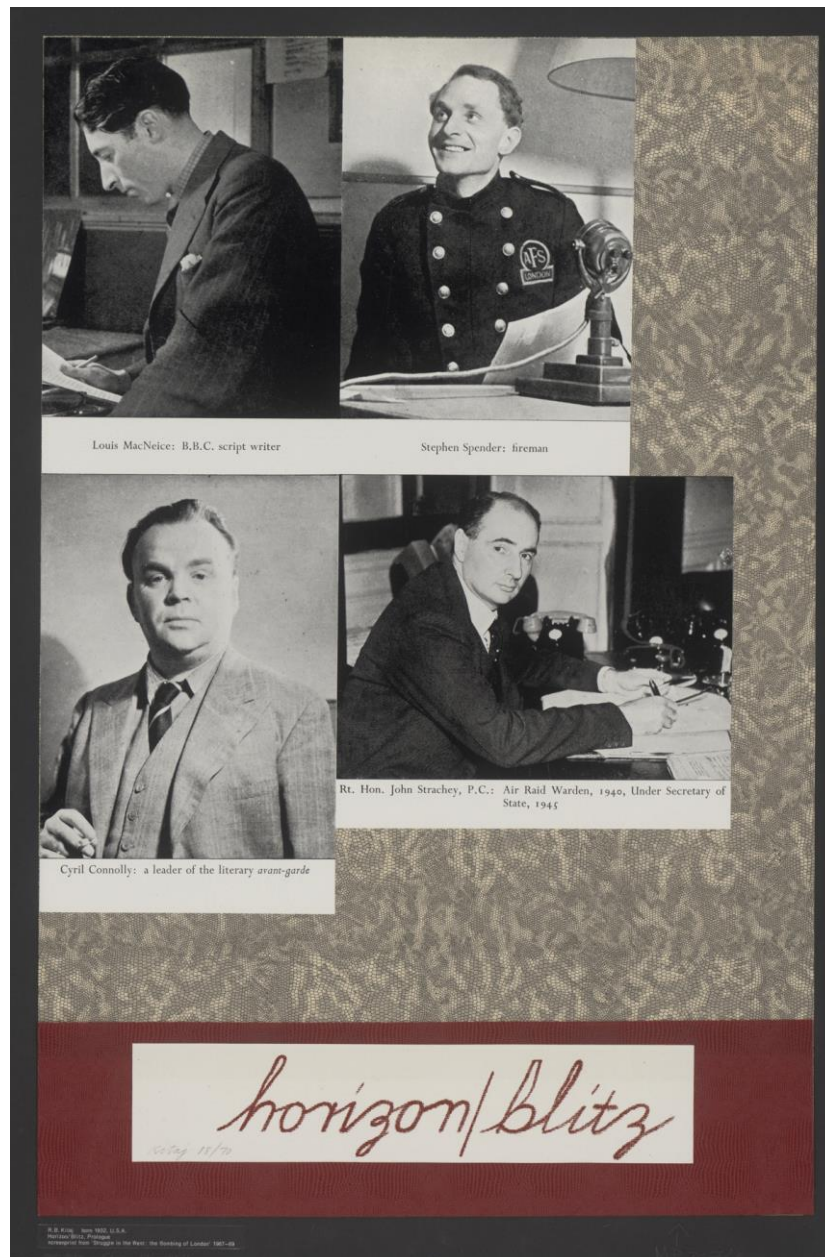


Fig. 44. *Horizon/Blitz*, from the series *Struggle in the West: The Bombing of London*, screenprint with collage, 1968



Fig. 45. *Die gute alte Zeit*, from *The Struggle in the West: The Bombing of London*, screenprint with collage, 1969

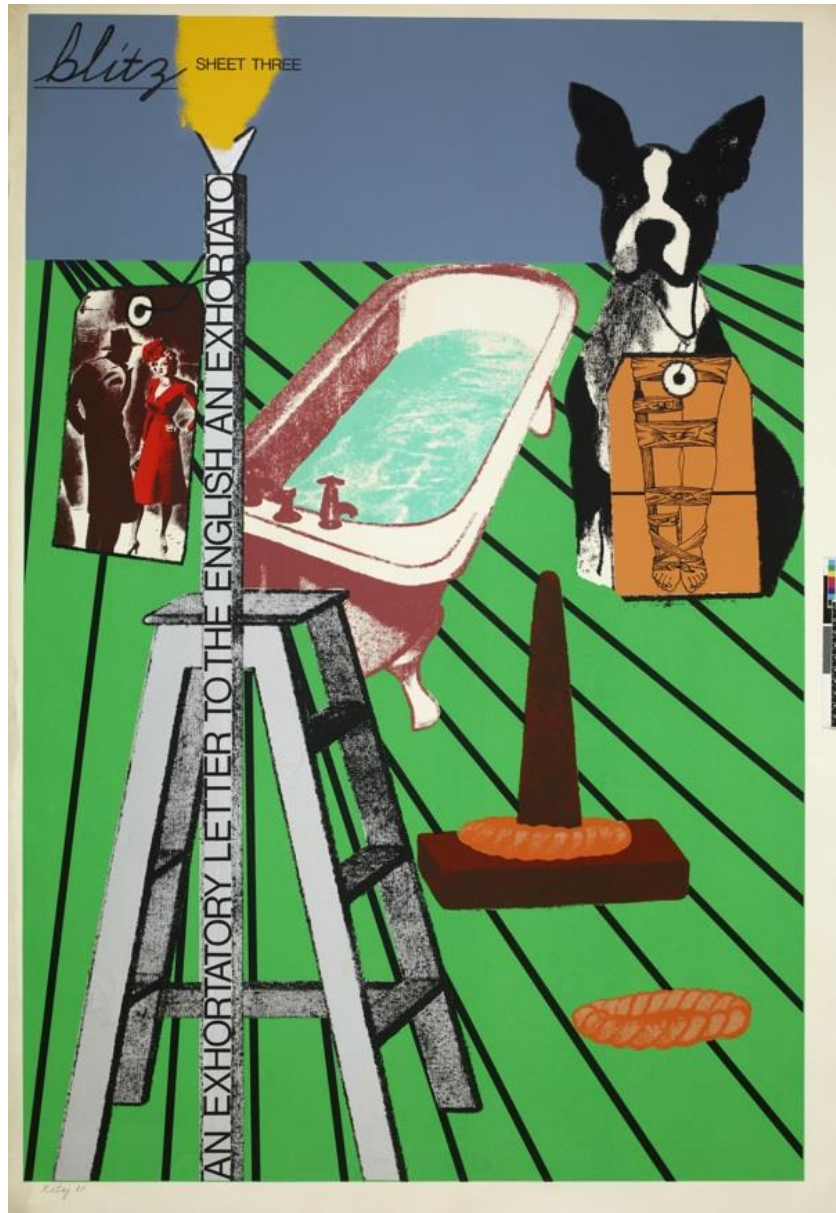


Fig. 46. *An Exhortatory Letter to the English* (Blitz 3), screenprint, c.1969, abandoned third sheet for *The Struggle in the West: The Bombing of London* (British Museum)



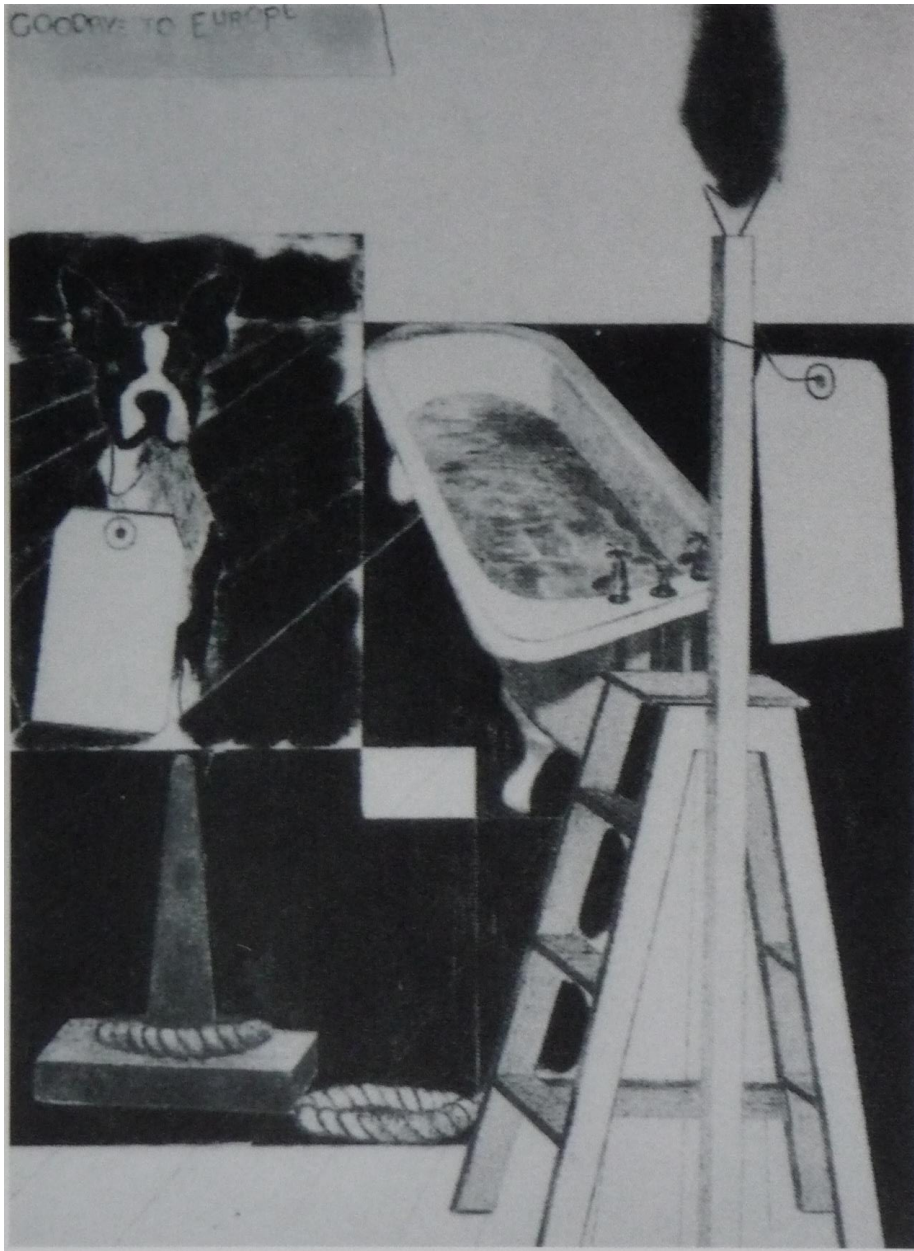


Fig. 47. *Goodbye to Europe*, oil on canvas, 1969 (private collection)

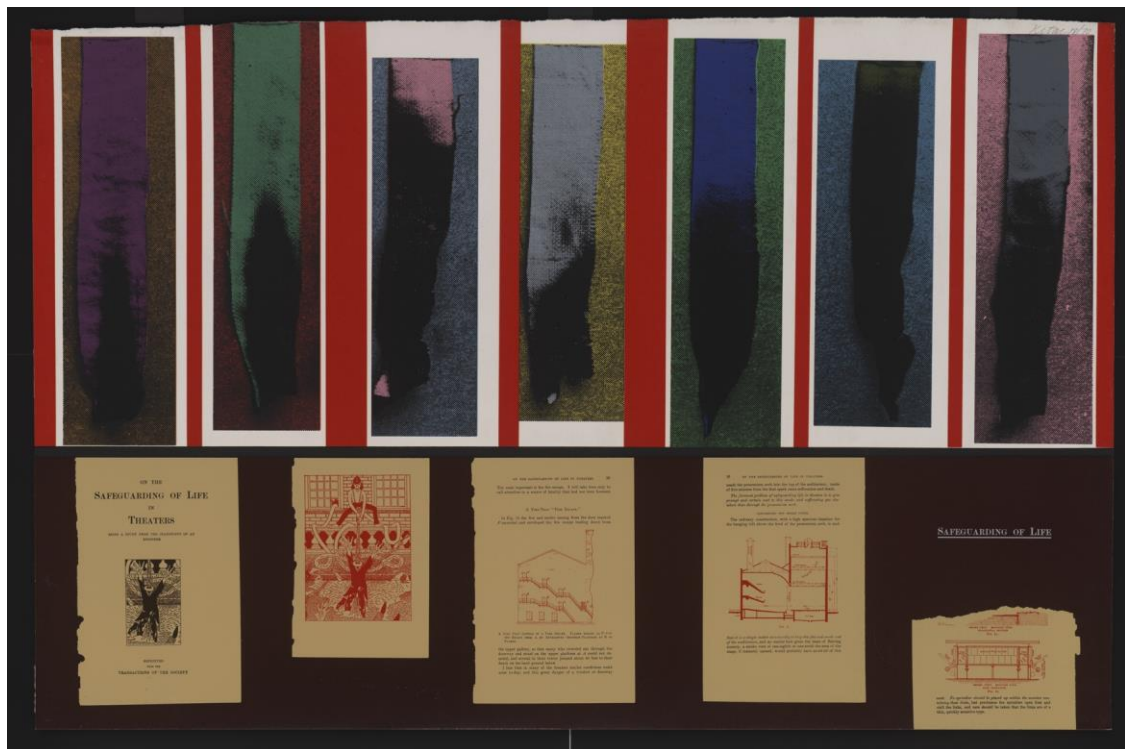


Fig. 48. *Safeguarding of Life*, from series *The Struggle in the West: The Bombing of London*, screenprint, 1968

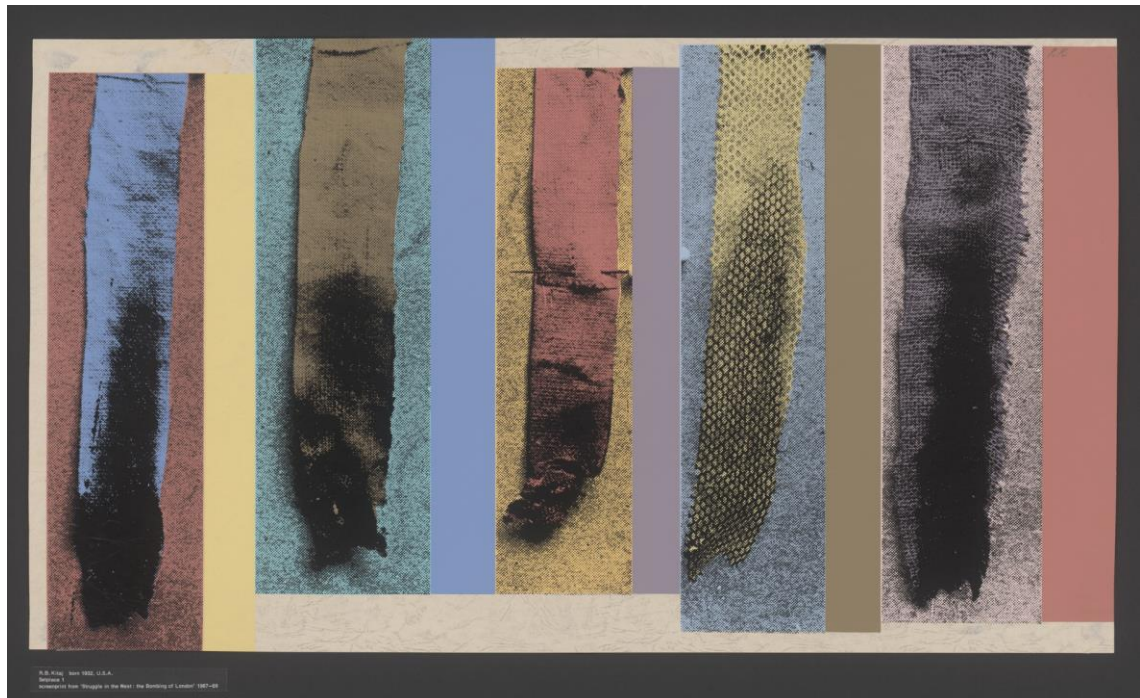


Fig. 49. *Setpiece 1*, from the series *The Struggle in the West: The Bombing of London*, screenprint, 1969



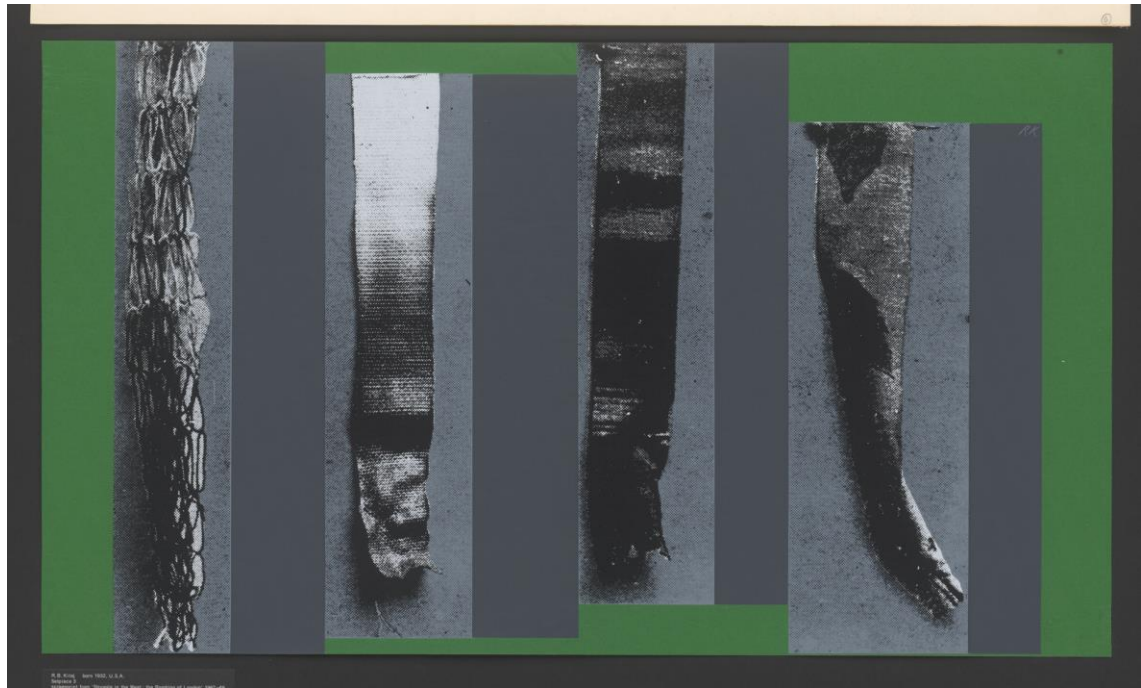


Fig. 50. *Setpiece 2*, from the series *The Struggle in the West: The Bombing of London*, screenprint, 1969

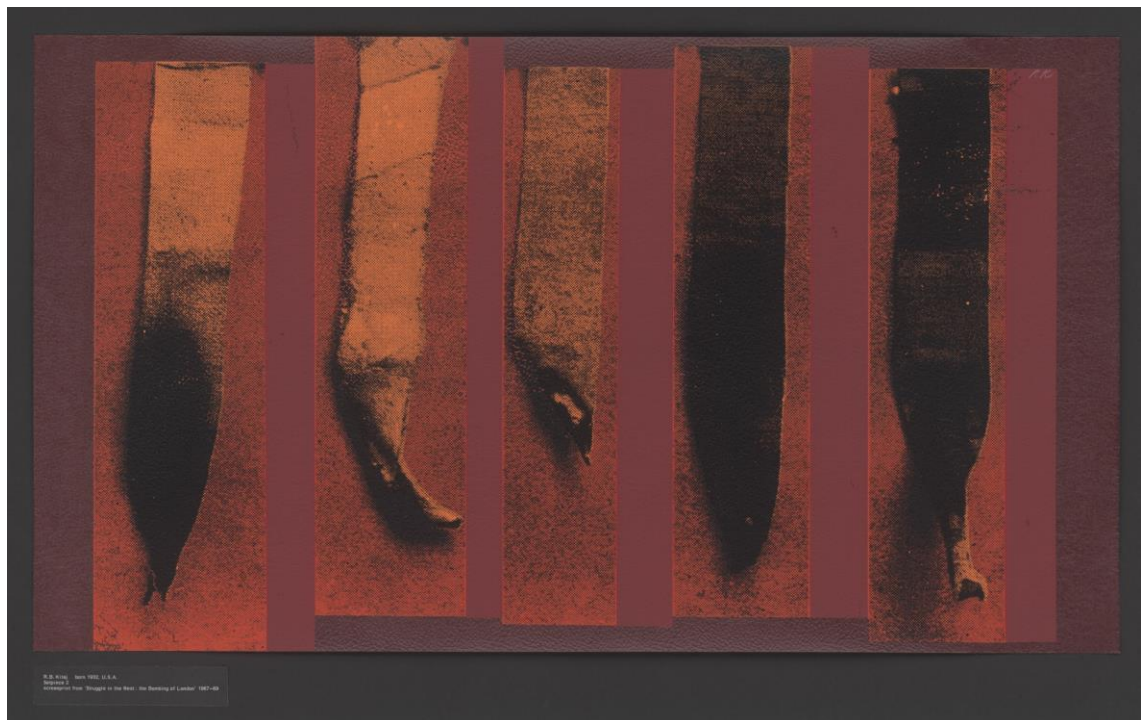


Fig. 51. *Setpiece 3*, from the series *The Struggle in the West: The Bombing of London*, screenprint, 1969

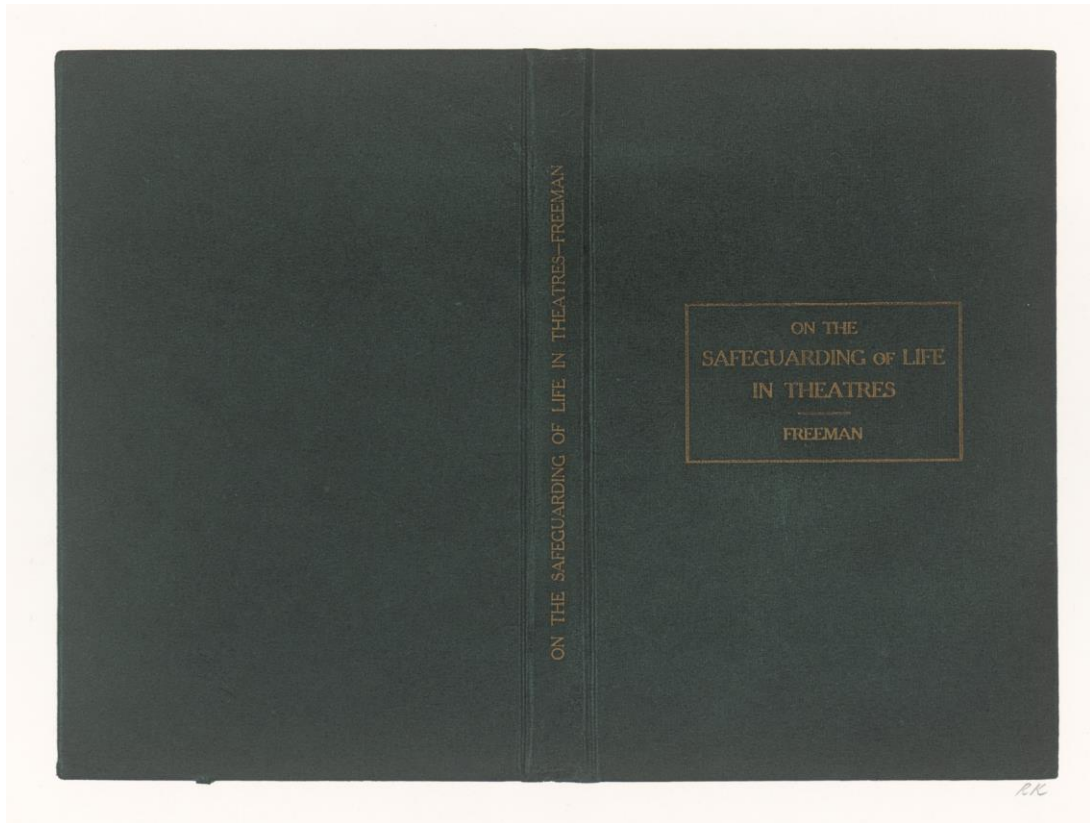


Fig. 52. *On the Safeguarding of Life in Theatres (Epilogue)*, from the series *The Struggle in the West: The Bombing of London*, screenprint, 1969

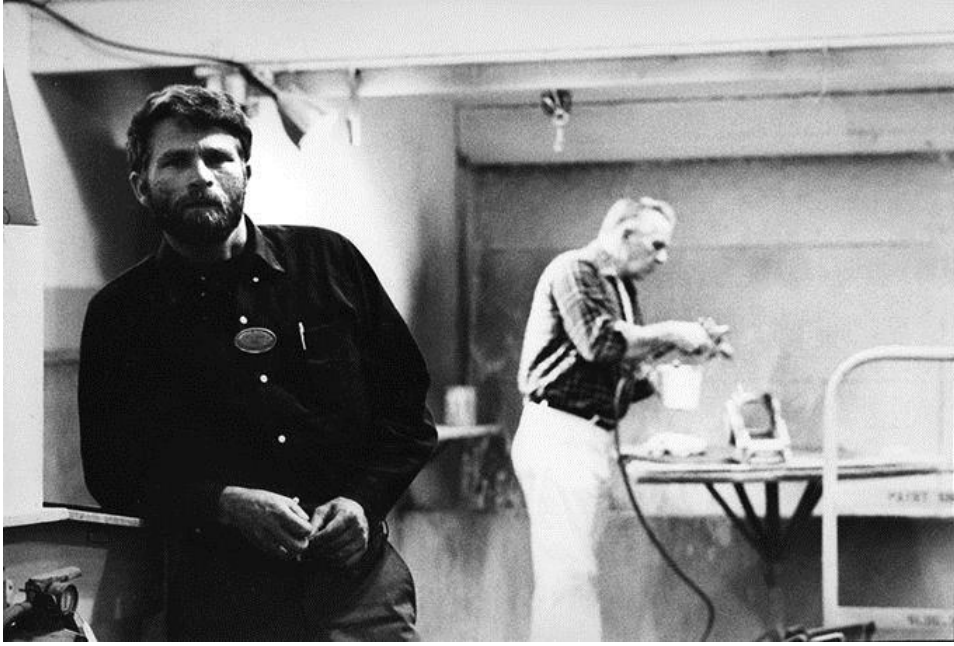


Fig. 53. Kitaj at Lockheed



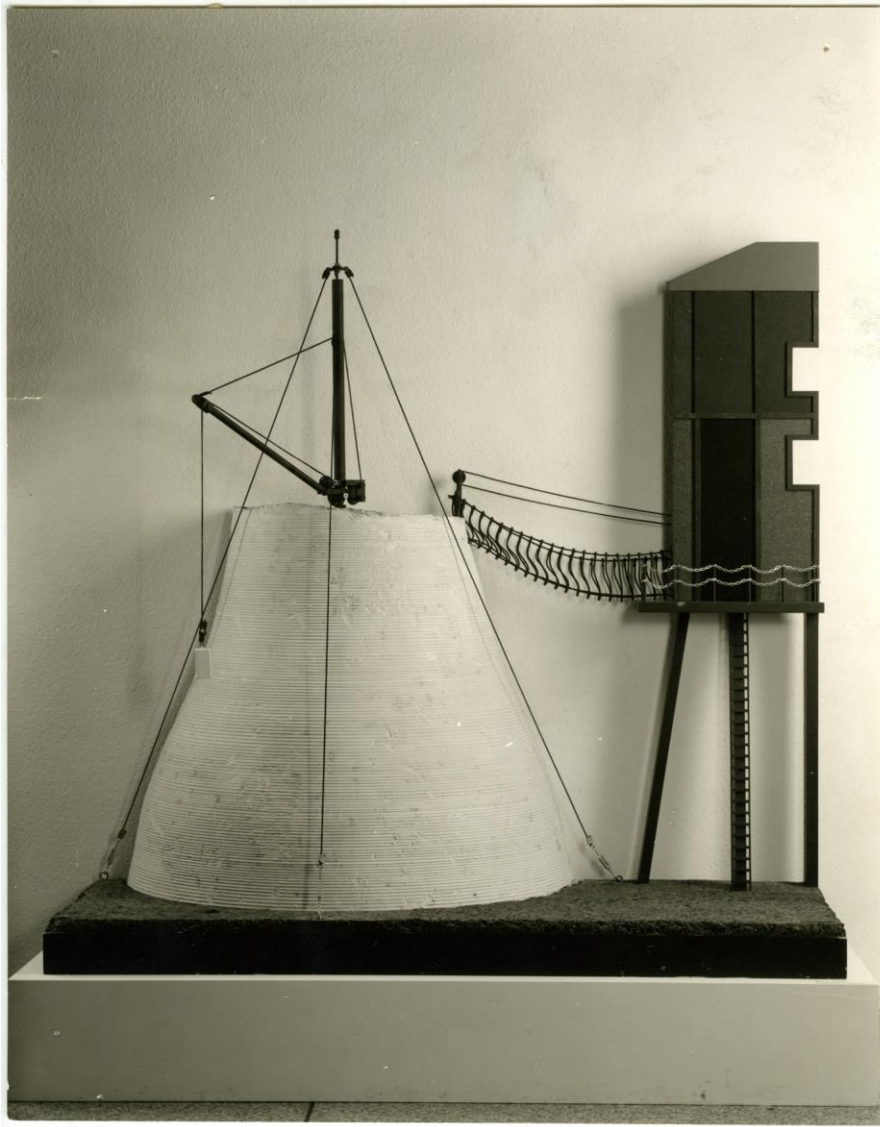


Fig. 54. *Our Thing*, from *Mock Up: Lives of the Engineers*, mixed media, 1969  
(whereabouts unknown)

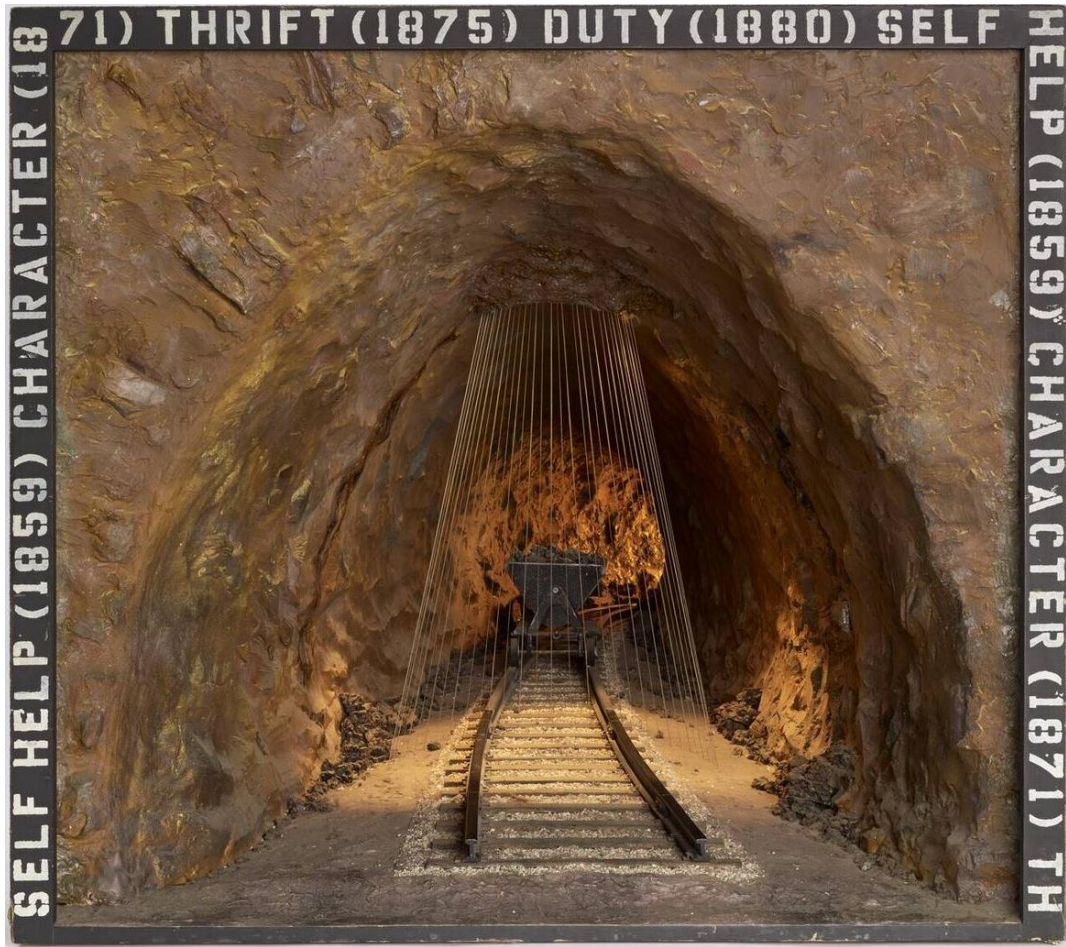


Fig. 55. *Coal Mine*, from *Mock Up: Lives of the Engineers*, mixed media, 1969  
(Boijmans van Beuningen Museum, Rotterdam)

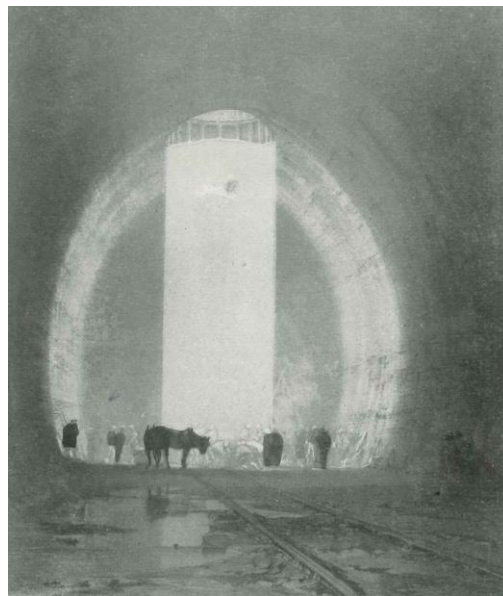


Fig. 56. John C Bourne, *Working Shaft, Kilsby Tunnel*, coloured lithograph, 1839



Fig. 57. *Black Mountain*, from *Mock Up: Lives of the Engineers*, vacuum formed plastic and wood, 1969 (Stephen Finer)



Fig. 58. Kitaj's inscription on the underside of *Black Mountain*



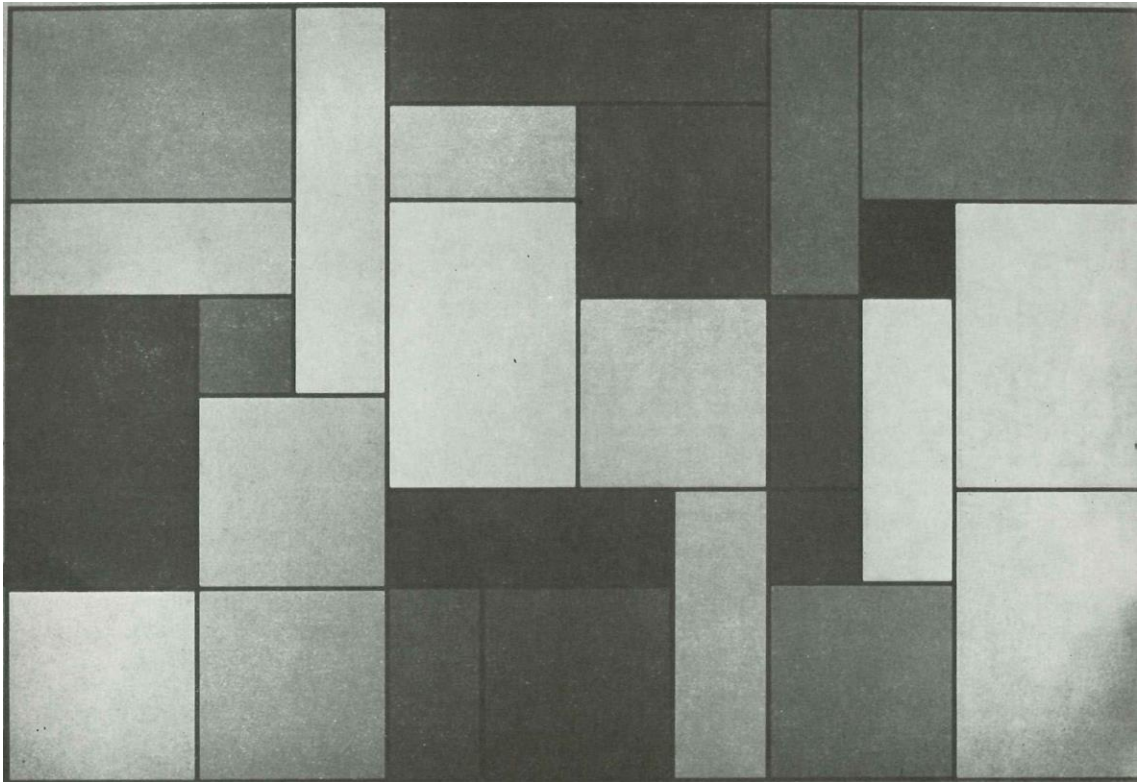


Fig. 59. *Chelsea Reach (First Version)*, from *Mock Up: Lives of the Engineers*, fabrics and wood, 1969, (current whereabouts unknown)

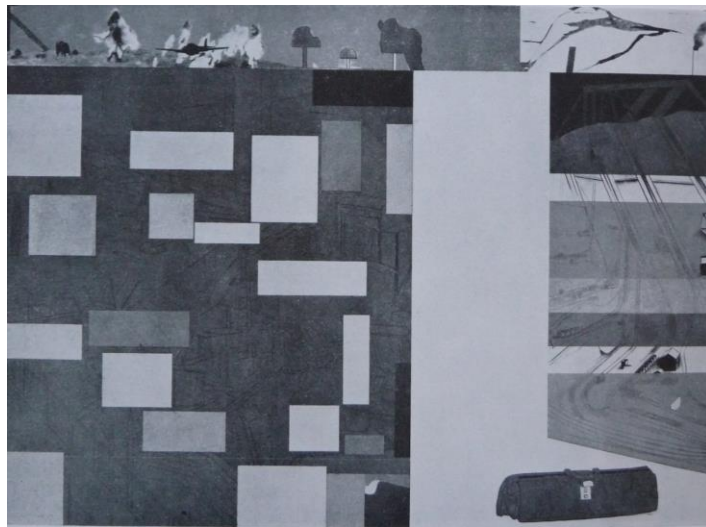


Fig. 60. *The Sorrows of Belgium*, oil on canvas, 1965 (Private Collection, Belgium)

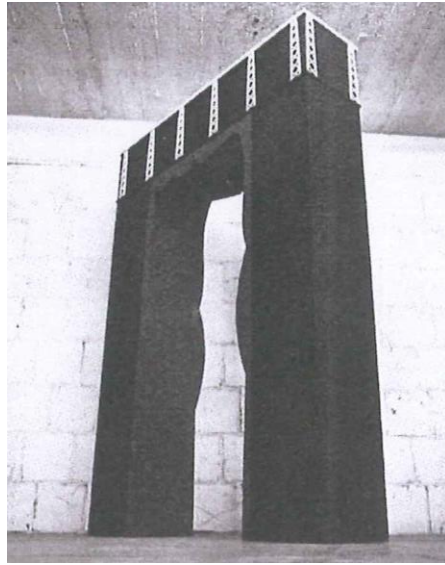


Fig. 61. *Arch/Viaduct*, from *Mock Up: Lives of the Engineers*, vacuum formed plastic, 1969 (current whereabouts unknown)

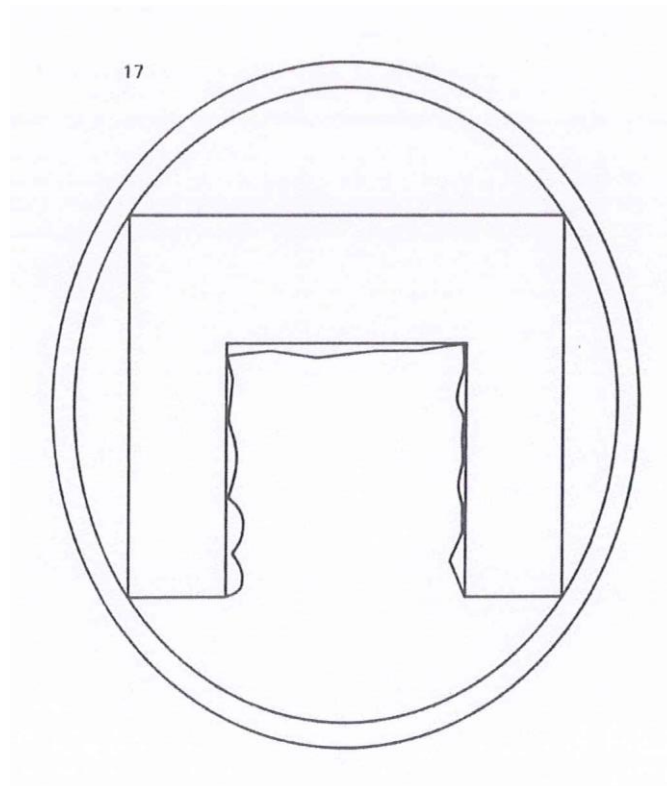


Fig. 62. *Computer drawing*, from *Mock Up: Lives of the Engineers*, 1969



Fig. 63. Constantin Brancusi, *The Gate of the Kiss*, 1938, part of the sculpture ensemble at Targu Jiu, Romania



Fig. 64. Thomas Talbot Bury, *Views: The Entrance into Manchester Across Water Street*, aquatint, 1831





Fig. 65. *Chimneys*, from *Mock Up: Lives of the Engineers*, vacuum formed plastic, 1969 (current whereabouts unknown)

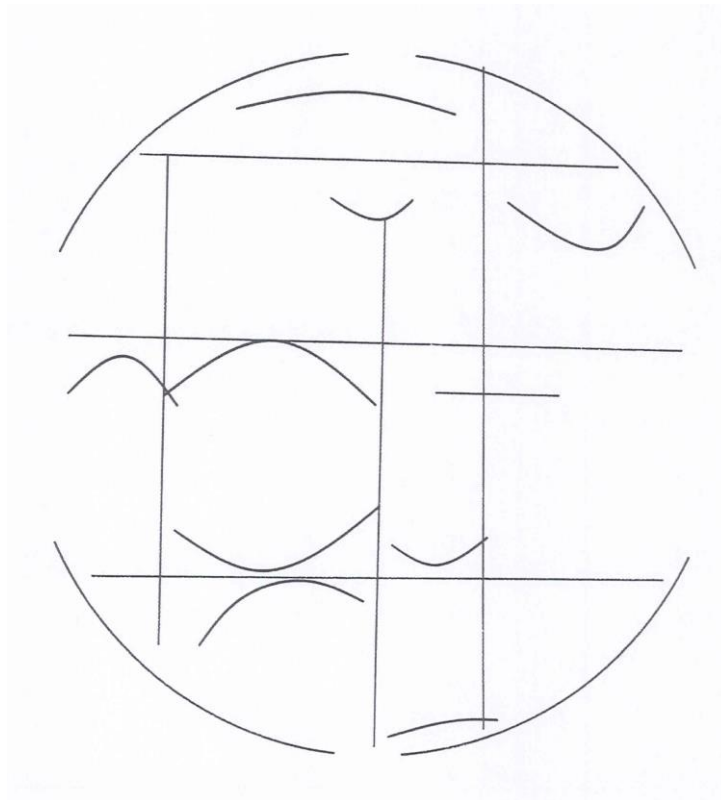


Fig. 66. *Computer Drawing*, from *Lives of the Engineers*, 1969



Fig. 67. *If Not, Not*, 1975-76, oil on canvas  
(Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, Edinburgh)



Fig. 68. Philip James de Loutherbourg, *Coalbrookdale by Night*, oil on canvas, 1801  
(Science Museum, London)





Fig. 69. Giorgione, *The Tempest*, oil on canvas, c.1508  
(Gallerie dell'Accademia, Venice)\



Fig. 70. Gatehouse, Auschwitz



Fig. 71. Vsevolod Pudovkin, *Mother*, 1926



Fig. 72. Victims of the massacre at My Lai, Vietnam, 1968

Fig. 73. *If Not, Not* (detail)

# 1st Photos of Viet Mass Slaying

**WEATHER**  
Some storms and  
colder today.  
High in the upper 20s.  
Details on Page 5-C.

## THE PLAIN DEALER

**FINAL**  
Stocks & Races  
Dow-Jones off 5.21

128TH YEAR—NO. 324

\* \* \* \* \*

OHIO'S LARGEST NEWSPAPER  
CLEVELAND, THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 20, 1969

96 PAGES 10 CENTS



A clump of bodies on a road in South Vietnam.

© 1969, Ronald L. Heston

### Exclusive

This photograph will shock Americans as it shocked the editors and the staff of The Plain Dealer. It was taken by a young Cleveland area man while serving as a photographer with the U.S. Army in South Vietnam.

It was taken during the attack by American soldiers on the South Vietnamese village My Lai, an attack which has made world headlines in recent days with disclosures of mass killings allegedly at the hands of American soldiers.

This photograph and others on two special pages are the first to be published anywhere of the killings.

This particular picture shows a clump of bodies of South Vietnamese civilians which includes women and children. Why they were killed raises one of the most momentous questions of the war in Vietnam.

### Cameraman Saw GIs Slay 100 Villagers

By JOSEPH ESZTERHAS  
(c) 1969, The Plain Dealer

Fig. 74. Front page of the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, Nov 20, 1969



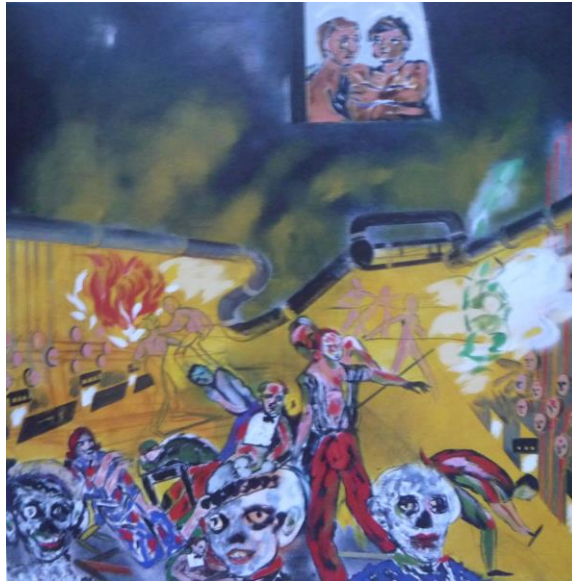


Fig. 75. *Germania (the Engine Room)*, oil on canvas, 1983-6 (private collection)

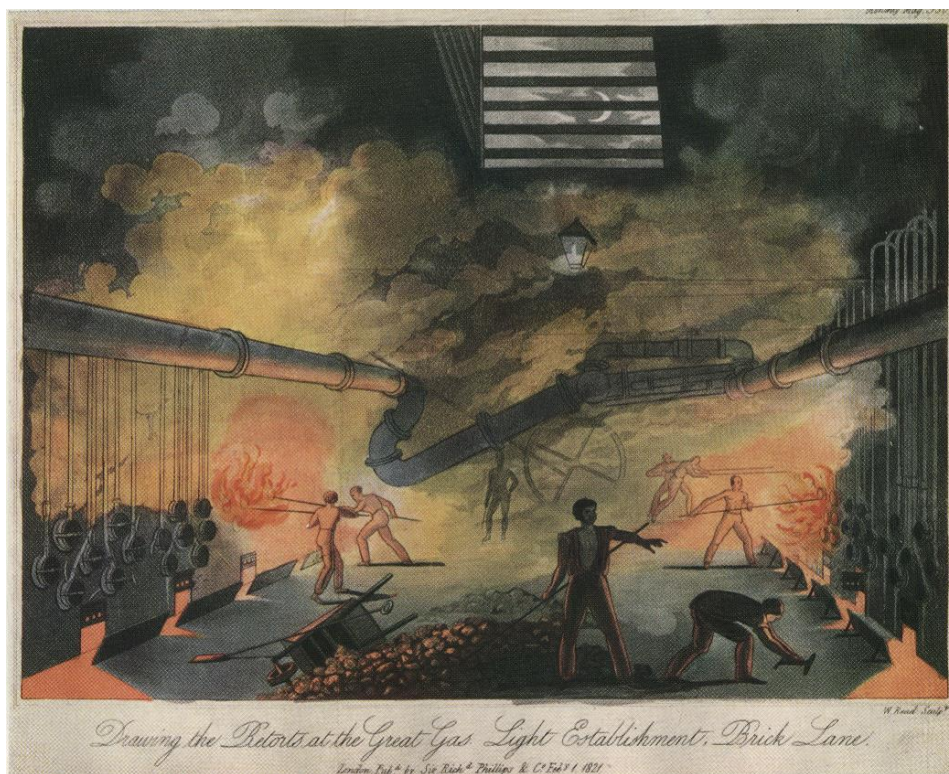


Fig. 76. W Read, *Drawing the Retorts at the Great Gas Light Establishment, Brick Lane*, coloured aquatint, 1821

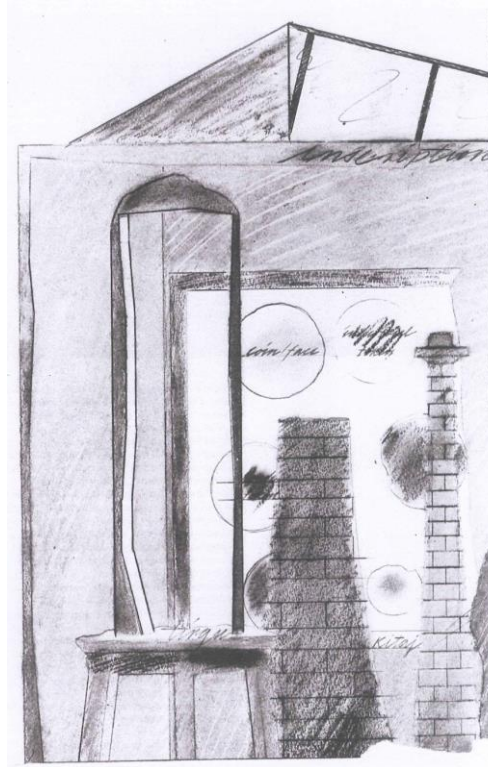


Fig. 77. *Drawing, from Mock Up: Lives of the Engineers, pastel, 1969 (whereabouts unknown)*

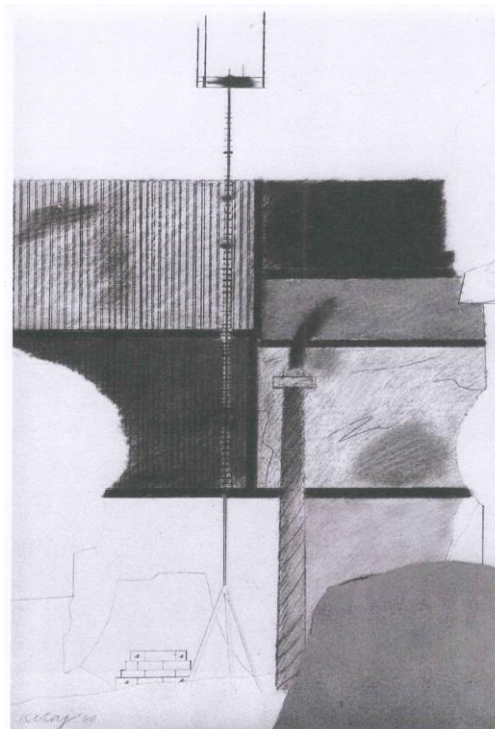


Fig. 78. *Drawing, from Mock Up: Lives of the Engineers, pastel, 1969 (whereabouts unknown)*

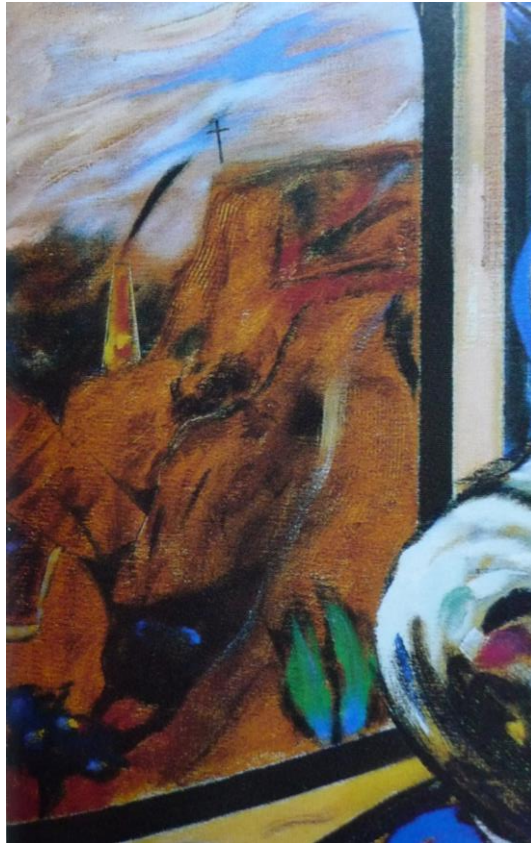


Fig. 79. *The Jewish Rider*, oil on canvas, 1984-5 (private collection). Detail of chimney on hillside.





Fig. 80. *Passion (1940-45) Writing*, oil on canvas, 1985 (Center for Jewish Studies, University of California, Los Angeles).

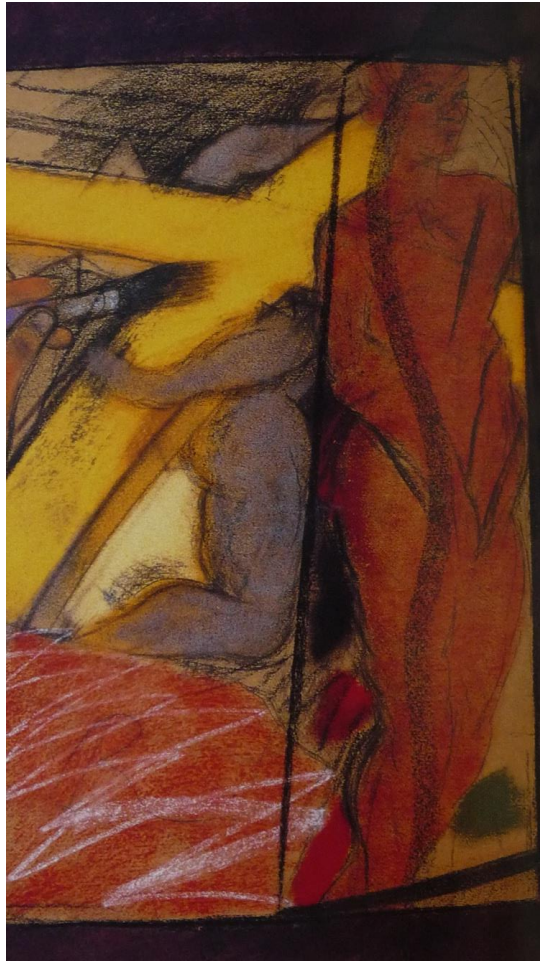


Fig. 81. *Painter (Cross and Chimney)*, charcoal and pastel on paper, 1984-5 (Center for Jewish Studies, University of California, Los Angeles). Detail of female figure within chimney.





Fig. 82. *Germania (the Tunnel)*, oil on canvas, 1985 (private collection, USA). Detail of self-portrait with leg in chimney.



Fig. 83. *Los Angeles No 13 (the Pram)*, oil on canvas, 2002-3 (private collection).

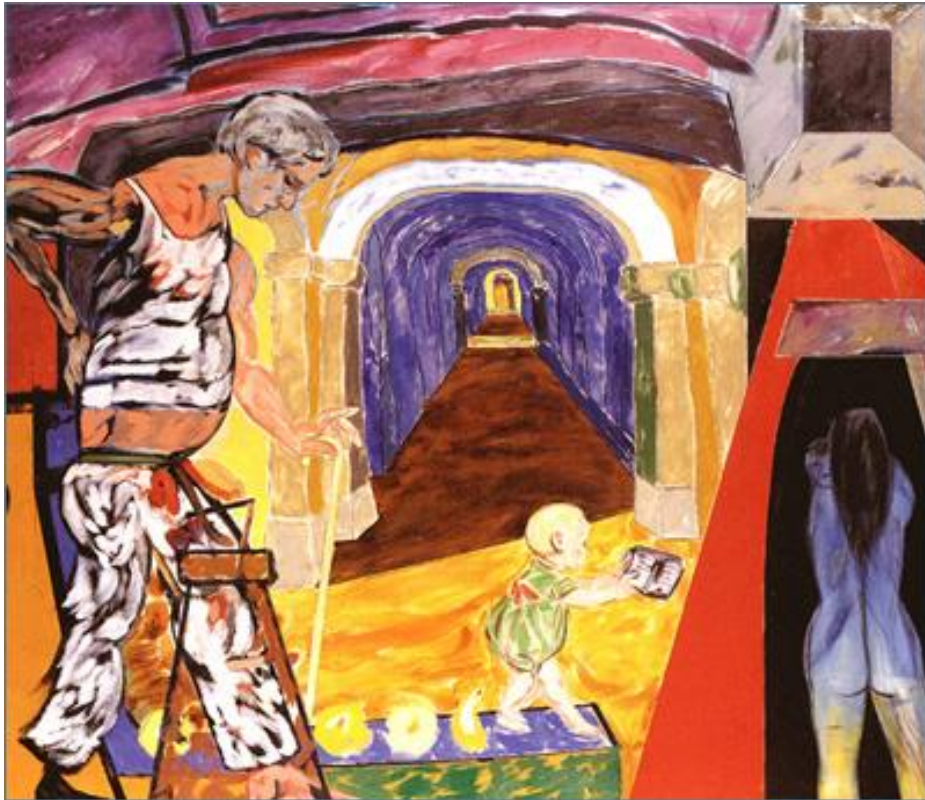


Fig. 84. *Germania (the Tunnel)*, oil on canvas, 1985 (private collection, USA).

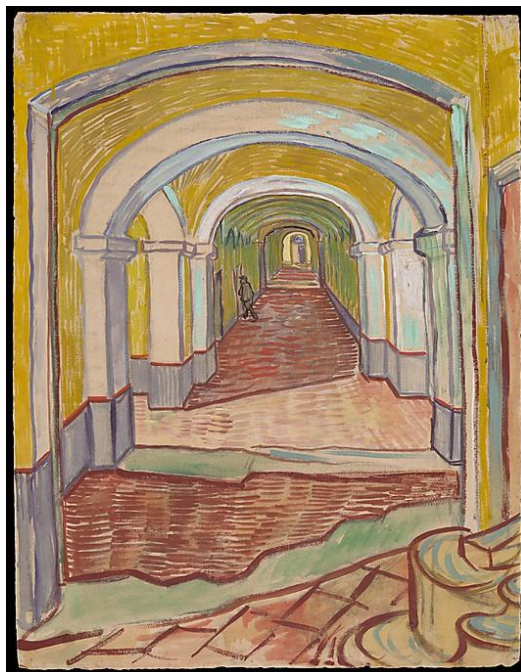


Fig. 85. Vincent van Gogh, *Corridor in the Asylum at St Remy*, oil colour and essence over black chalk on paper, 1889 (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York)





Fig. 86. Leon Kossoff, *Portrait of George Thompson*, oil on board, 1975  
(Arts Council Collection)



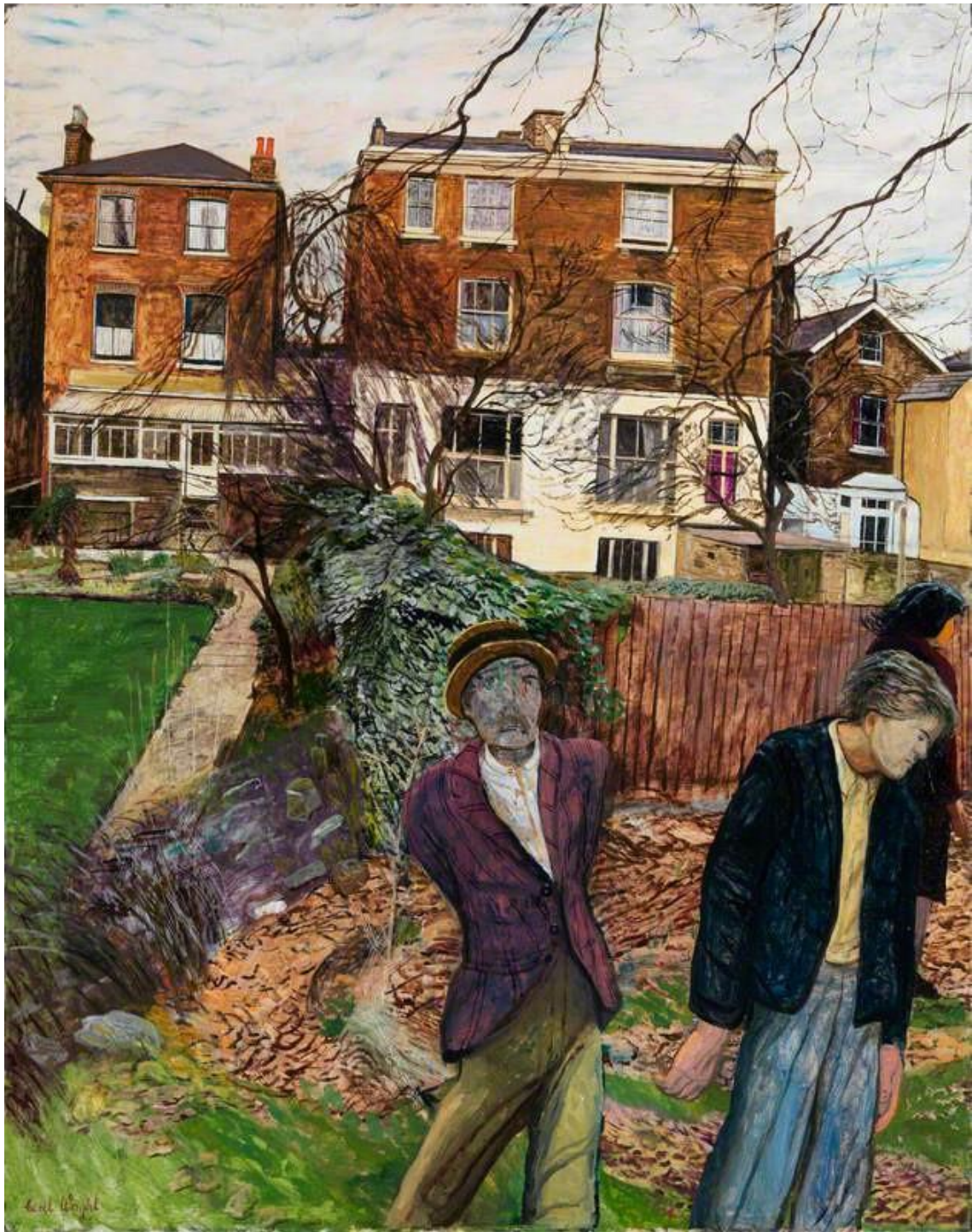


Fig. 87. Carel Weight, *The World We Live In*, oil on board, 1973

(Arts Council Collection)



Fig. 88. *Desk-Murder*, oil on canvas, 1970-84 (Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery)



Fig. 89. Illustration from *Lectures*, by Fritz Saxl, showing detail of pikes in *The Surrender at Breda* by Diego Velazquez.





Fig. 90. *The Red Dancer of Moscow*, screenprint, 1975

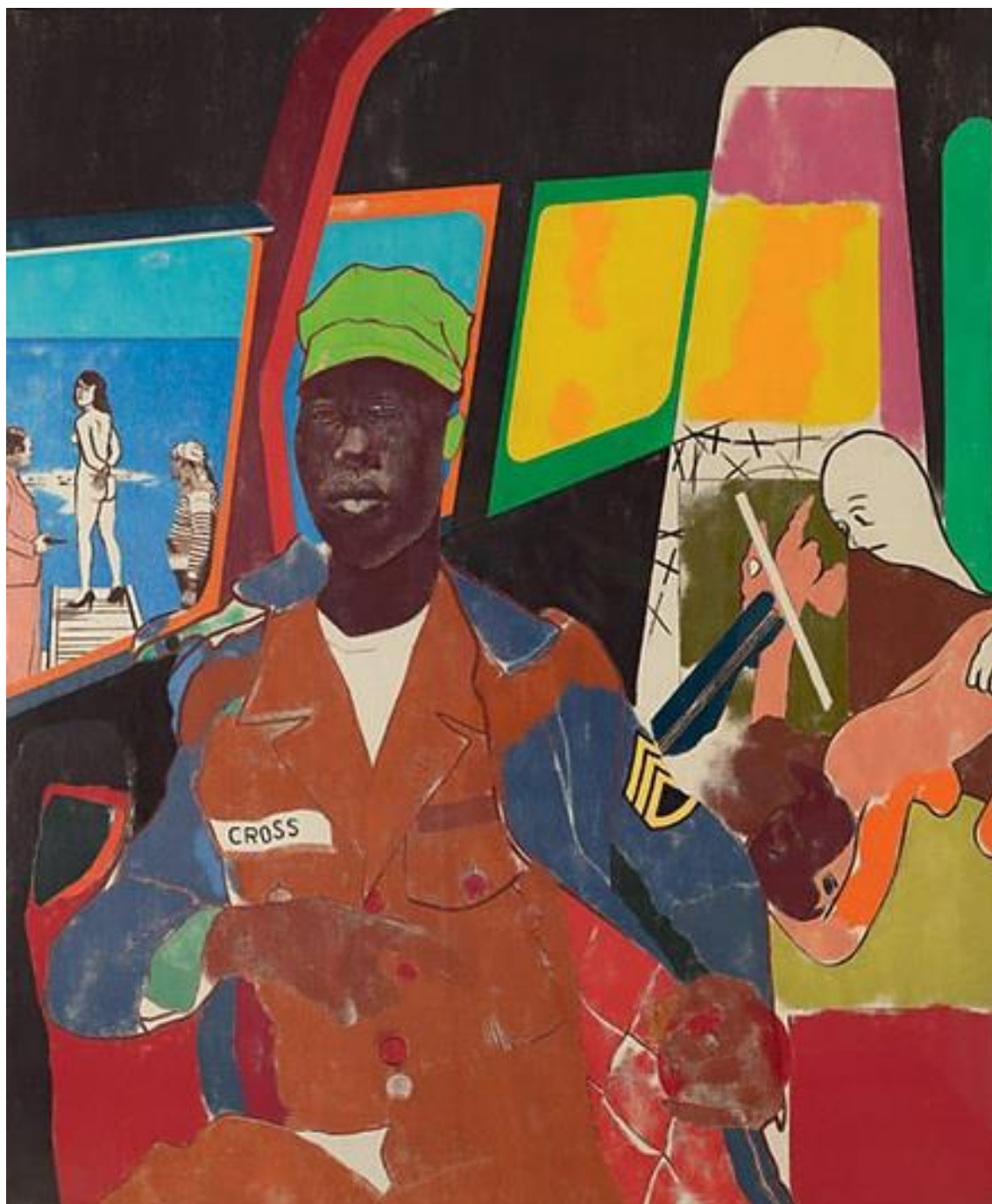


Fig. 91. *Juan de la Cruz*, oil on canvas, 1967 (Astrup Fearnley Collection, Oslo)